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# **PIONEERS OF OUR FAITH**











# PIONEERS OF OUR FAITH

BY  
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FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

WITH TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS

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To  
M. D. P.  
J. C. P.  
E. F. L. P.



## PREFACE

THE first chapter of this book would be called by M. Hippolyte Delehaye the 'dossier' of St Alban. The remainder of the book aims at reproducing fully, vividly and exactly all that is fairly trustworthy in the ancient records of the too dimly remembered pioneers, women as well as men, who annexed to Christendom the earliest England, from the Channel to the Clyde and Forth.

Real biography is essentially imaginative, describing the refracted image of its object which has been formed in the mind of the biographer—a mere assemblage of his own thoughts, even when he believes himself to be reporting the actual words of his hero. In the mind, moreover, of every reader is reproduced a somewhat different image, more or less blurred, which owes much of its clearness to his own mental equipment, and is enriched or impoverished by the width or narrowness of his own outlook on human life. The posthumous influence, therefore, of a 'saint,' his place as we call it in history, is determined, from age to age, by the totality of such traditional images.

Though I have been scrupulously faithful to my Latin sources, even keeping many quaint metaphors, I have deliberately eschewed the verbal translation which is commonly called literal. On contemporary narratives, no less trustworthy than Bede's, are based my accounts of Fursey and his brothers, Bathildis, Burgundofara and her nuns, Cuthbert and Wilfrith. Guthlac is reluctantly omitted, for lack of space to do him justice. In abridging later hagiography, nearly all written in the twelfth century, I have sifted, as well as I could, wheat from chaff, but have chosen rather to retain some chaff than risk the loss of any wheat: thus, and in other ways, has my own mind modified the image-forming impressions it received.

In the spelling of names I have steered my own wobbling course between the Scylla of inaccuracy and the Charybdis of pedantry, using the shortest forms of those that are familiar, dropping Latin terminations and replacing *Æ* by the appropriate single vowel, Oswiu, Oswini, Oidilwāld and Caedualia are so spelt in the extant manuscripts of Bedā's History. To the Northumbrian name-suffix *a* corresponded the West Saxon *i*; both were added to a base of one syllable. The two elements or themes of other names often formed a meaningless jumble. In Os-wald, for instance, the first means god, the second forest. It seems worth while to remind my readers of a few features in the pronunciation of Old English. After *l* and *r*, also before *t*, *h* was a guttural; *g* before *e* and *i* had the sound of *y*; medial *th* and final, like our initial, was flat; *ea* formed not one syllable but two, the *e* being pronounced as in the French *les*. Inny, winny would be our phonetic spelling of Ini, wini or wine, which means friend. Initial C was always hard.

For the sake of some readers, it may be also worth while to explain that, in its literal sense, the word monk means a man who dwells *alone*, in search of closer communion with God; and that monastery likewise means his wretched hovel. 'A hermit loves his *desert*'; an anchorite has *withdrawn* himself from social intercourse, even with fellow monks; a cenobite shares the *common life* of an association of monks, who regard themselves as a family of brethren, yet spend much time apart, both in their forest clearings and in their own cells. Not, like those words, from the Greek, but from the Aramaic *abba*, father, comes the name abbat or abbot, of the head of the family. When abbot and brethren *came together* to discuss family affairs; the meeting was called a convent; but the word was afterwards applied, first to the place of meeting, then, like monastery, to the whole block of buildings.

The last paragraph of Chapter II is due to Professor James Cooper, of Glasgow University. The derivations on

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pages 156, 205, 374 are severally due to Sir John Rhys; to Professor Skeat, jointly with Mr A. L. Mayhew; and to Professor Skeat alone. My quotations from the Psalter are given in the new version of Professor Driver's Parallel Psalter; from other books of the Bible, in the Revised Version. I have to thank Mr H. R. Campion, Minor Canon of Ely, for permission to reproduce his photographs of the Ely corbels.

The following Kalendar of my saints is merely a record, of popular veneration. Very few of them became, by well-authenticated posthumous miracles, entitled to formal canonization. Though Theodore was never so styled, it seemed ungrateful to exclude him.

CHARLES PLATTS

Letchworth

August, 1910

## KALENDAR OF SAINTS

**C**APITALS distinguish those whose work is fully described in this book from those who are incidentally mentioned.

The day on which a saint ended his earthly travail is called his dies natalis or birthday.

### JANUARY

- 8 Ailred of Rievaulx
- 9 Hadrian  
Brihtwald
- 11 Ecgwin
- 12 BENET BISCOP
- 13 KENTIGERN(MUNGO)
- 16 FURSEY
- 17 Mildgith
- 26 BATHILDIS
- 29 Gildas

### FEBRUARY

- 2 Lawrence
- 8 WERBURH
- 11 CADMON
- 18 ERMENILD
- 15 OSWIU
- 20 Mildred
- 23 Milburh
- 24 ALBERT

### MARCH

- 1 David
- 2 CHAD
- 4 OWINI

### MARCH

- 6 Cyneburh
- 7 EOSTERWINI
- 8 FELIX
- 12 Gregory the Great
- 17 Witburh
- 18 Gertrudis
- 20 CUTHBERT  
HERBERT
- 21 Benedict of Monte Cassino
- 23 Oidilwald the hermit

### APRIL

- 24 Ecgberht (comrade of  
Chad)  
Mellit
- 30 Erkenwald

### MAY

- 1 Asaph  
Ultan
- 6 Eadberht (bishop of Lin-  
disfarne)
- 7 JOHN OF BEVERLEY
- 12 Pancras
- 25 ALDHELM

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### MAY

- 25 BEDA
- 26 Austin
- 28 German of Auxerre •

### JUNE

- 5 Winfrith Boniface
- 9 Columkille
- 17 Botulf
- 22 ALBAN
- 28 AWDRY
- 24 Bartholomew
- 25 Milburh

### JULY

- 6 SEXBURH
- 7 ATHELBURH(Auberge)
- 13 Mildred
- 14 Frithona Deusdedit
- Earconberht
- 29 Loup of Troyes

### AUGUST

- 5 OSWALD
- 6 ACCA
- 8 COLMAN
- 20 OSWINI
- 21 Brothers of Arwald
- 22 SIGEFRITH
- 25 ABB
- 28 Augustine of Hippo
- 31 AIDAN

### AUGUST

- 31 Cuthburh
- Eanswith

### SEPTEMBER

- 9 BOISIL
- 16 NINIAN
- 19 [Theodore]
- 22 Hygebald
- 23 Adamnan
- 25 CEOLFRITH

### OCTOBER

- 3 WILFRITH
- 10 PAULIN
- 11 AGILBERT
- Athelburh of Barking
- 12 EDWIN
- 26 CEDD
- EATA
- 31 Begu
- Foillan

### NOVEMBER

- 7 Wilbrord Clement
- 10 Just
- 14 Medan
- 17 HILD
- 23 Columban

### DECEMBER

- 3 BIRIN
- 7 BURGUNDOFARA
- 16 Bean



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# PIONEERS OF OUR FAITH

## CHAPTER I. THE PROTOMARTYR OF BRITAIN

•Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. John xv, 13.

**T**HE literary memorials of such early Christian martyrs as are not merely fabulous admit of a fourfold classification. In the first nearly empty class stand official records (*Acta proconsularia*) of the trial and execution; for example, the Acts of the Scillitan martyrs, which lay lost in the British Museum till, on August 30, 1890, a manuscript copy was there discovered by Armitage Robinson. The name Acts is often improperly applied to narratives which expand official records or assume that form, but their proper name is *Passion* (*Passio*). Those faithful twelve were beheaded at Carthage on July 17, 180. Copies of their dialogue with Saturninus the proconsul, made by an official scribe, were eagerly bought and carefully kept by their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

Less accurate, and less austere, but fuller of touching pathos, are the few extant narratives of trustworthy and sympathetic eyewitnesses which form the second class, written by themselves or their contemporaries. By far the best is the famous letter, preserved by Eusebius, which describes the martyrdom at Lyon, in the year 177, of Pothinus, the aged bishop, Blandina, the fragile slave girl, and their forty-six fellow sufferers. It was addressed by the churches of Lyon and Vienne to the churches in Asia of the Apocalypse and their neighbours in Phrygia.

A lower standard of slavish fidelity to mere fact is attained by the numerous class of narratives, compiled long after the event, which have for their primary source

## 2 THE PROTOMARTYR OF BRITAIN .

a document of the first or second class. Of these a fair specimen is the Passion of St Symphorian, compiled in the earlier half of the fifth century. His martyrdom at Autun was probably an event of the same persecution. A Greek manuscript found in the year 1887 among the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris was believed to be the Acts of the Scillitan martyrs till it was, by the later discovery, both degraded and promoted to the second or third class.

Into the fourth and most numerous class fall the historical romances which have no firmer foundation than floating tradition and literary reminiscence, and in which the play of fancy has often been so free that we can feel sure of hardly anything but the martyr's name, the existence of his sanctuary and the date of his festival. In its literal sense the name Legend means a narrative appointed *to be read* on the festival of a saint and is, therefore, properly applied to every such narrative; but it may not unfitly be confined, in accordance with custom, to the countless array of honest tributes paid by reverent imagination to hallowed and hallowing memory. Of the protomartyr of Britain, for instance, nothing more can be regarded as indubitable fact than that his name was Alban and that he was beheaded near Verulam, instead of his guest, on June 22, in some undetermined year before Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire. Yet his legend, in its earlier and later forms, enshrines the fruitful thought of devout and sympathetic minds. Moreover, by kindling faith in many a yearning soul, the light of his reputed self-sacrifice has, though partly borrowed, shone as brightly as any down the ages.

Towards the end of the earlier half of the sixth century the strenuous and thoughtful Christian patriot Gildas, writing either at Glastonbury, or on Flat Holmes in the Bristol Channel, or at his own monastery of Ruis in Brittany, devoted a paragraph of his bombastic jeremiad to

the tradition of St Alban then current. A confessor, he tells us, hotly pursued by persecutors, was on the point of being caught when Alban gave him shelter in his own house. Then they exchanged clothes, and, as the Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep, so, with true brotherly love, did the disguised host gladly give himself up to the pursuers of his guest. While he was entering the river on his way to the place of execution, with a thousand men in his train, the waters, like those of Jordan before the wandering Israelites, stood up in a heap to make way for them. The sight of this marvel changed the prospective executioner from a wolf to a lamb, and made him eager to win, as the comrade of his prisoner, the martyr's crown of triumph. So ill-informed was Gildas that he names his river the Thames; and he could, as he admits, only guess that the persecution was the last of the series, and the most fierce, wrongly ascribed to Diocletian, whose failing health made him a mere tool in the hands of Galerius, his vicious and violent colleague. How widely that guess missed the mark appears from the consensus of trustworthy historians that Britain lay outside the range of that persecution. It will presently appear that, for aught we know to the contrary, the proto-martyr of Britain had in his veins only Roman blood; and that to all the framers of his legend as we have it, the vernacular of Verulam, whether Welsh or English, was a foreign tongue.

Alban's posthumous renown connects him with the one heretic, Morien or Pelagius, that can be claimed for the Romano-British Church. In the first decade of the fifth century this native of West Wales, whose name means offspring of the sea, was leading at Rome the quiet life of a lay monk and putting to shame by his consistency the laxity there prevalent among his fellow Christians. Having found, as he believed, in himself such antiphonal harmony that to the 'You ought!' of conscience always rang clear the answering 'I can and will!' of reason, Pelagius



readily followed a speculative Syrian named Rufinus in disputing the necessity of prevenient grace, which was then being eloquently developed into a doctrine by Augustine of Hippo, the inventor of the phrase, 'original sin.' The active and somewhat noisy proclaimer of the heresy was, however, neither Rufinus nor Pelagius, but their friend Celestius, a native of Ireland, who, after practising as a pleader in the law courts of Rome, was ordained priest at Ephesus. In that city was held, A.D. 431, the ecumenical Council, cleverly packed by Cyril of Alexandria, which condemned both him and Nestorius.

In the year 429, at the request of a Gallic synod, perhaps also of Pope Celestine, two eminent bishops, German of Auxerre and Loup of Troyes, accepted the invitation of orthodox British Christians to check the spread among them of Pelagianism. After refuting its expounders in a crowded conference at Verulam, they visited the tomb of St Alban, to whose aid they believed their victory was partly due. Thence German carried home to Auxerre a load of earth, and built upon it, in the martyr's honour, a church which bore his name. In the year 1025, according to a French chronicler, 'the city of Auxerre caught fire and became a heap of smoking ashes, all but the church of blessed Alban the martyr which had been built by blessed German.'

The moral atmosphere of Gaul, desolated by Vandals, was, in the old age of those bishops, becoming so mephitic that genuine Christians felt a growing need of such spiritual ozone as they could extract from exhilarating records of the militant Church. In spite of the nominal conversion of Clovis and his Franks, that fair battlefield of contending races was, in the sixth century, fuller than in the fifth of debauchery and infamy. The rhetorical skill bequeathed by Athens and Rome to the schools of Gaul was, therefore, exercised in so depicting afresh the trials and triumphs of famous champions that pride in a goodly heritage might

feed the sacrificial fire of faith. Local patriotism caused each writer to claim eminence for the heroes of his own neighbourhood. Sometimes the secular clergy were the middlemen through whom demand stimulated supply of such healthy fiction. In Troyes, for instance, a small chapel dedicated to St Patroclus or Parre attracted but few worshippers until the priest in charge produced a copy of that martyr's Acts and satisfied both his bishop and his neighbours of its authenticity. In due time a large congregation replaced the overcrowded chapel by a magnificent church, and the priest rose from penury to affluence.

The following is a scrupulously faithful and, where possible, literal translation of a *Passio Sancti Albani*, which was doubtless composed to glorify the martyr and edify his admirers in Auxerre. An extremely corrupt copy, the only one known to exist, lay lost in the library of Turin until it was there discovered, in September, 1903, by Professor W. Meyer of Göttingen. So odd and rare is the handwriting that the scribe must have been trained in Gaul about the end of the eighth century; and the finder has convincingly proved that the original must have been written while one Gregory was bishop of Langres, that is between the years 506 and 540. Though Gildas wrote between the latter of these years and 547, his information must have come from an independent source, probably oral. The coupling of Agen with Lyon may be due to the fact that the former city was the author's birthplace; possibly, however, the word he wrote was not Agen but Vienne. The italicized phrases present, in the Latin, close verbal parallels with two earlier pieces of hagiography; the one, distinguished by [S.], the passion of Symphorian; the other, also written between 506 and 540, the tripartite passion of four disciples of Polycarp, namely (1) Irenaeus of Lyon, (2) Andochius and Thyrsus of Saulieu, (3) Benignus of Dijon. Some of the phrases are so peculiar that they may well have come from the common stock of a literary circle;

## 6 THE PROTOMARTYR OF BRITAIN

but taste and skill were then so decadent that no author felt ashamed of copying. To Bede are due the two bracketed sentences, one of which supplies an omission, the other enshrines a happier thought than the sentence it follows.

The emperor who plays the leading part in the following narrative is Septimius Severus. By an edict issued in the year of grace 202 he forbade future conversions to Judaism or Christianity. Of the resulting persecution, the work rather of provincial governors than of the emperor himself, many were victims who had long been Christians. There is no historical evidence that this persecution extended to the western provinces of the empire, but it has the special interest of being the first persecution based rather on fear than on hatred or contempt. No longer was the initiative left to voluntary informers, as it had been since the famous rescript of Trajan to Pliny. In the year 208 Severus was borne on a litter into the extreme north of Roman Britain and superintended the completion of the imperishable barrier which stretches from Wallsend to Bowness. He must have passed through Verulam, which lies close to Watling Street, and may well have tarried there. Being, like York, a municipium, that city conferred on every person born within its massive walls the full dignity of a *civis Romanus*. Our nameless hagiographer seems to have had no other reason than his knowledge of that visit for assigning so early a date to this martyrdom, and to have transferred to Severus the part really played by an ordinary judge, whom he once mentions.

## PASSION OF SAINT ALBAN THE MARTYR

### I. INTRODUCTION

The great and surpassing excellence of martyrs is rather belittled than displayed by such a grovelling instrument as language. Yet nothing essential is thus lost by excellence of such towering stature that it speaks for itself. In the Gospel our Lord "Jesus Christ says: 'From East

and West will many come and feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'

*That ravening and roaring lion* the emperor Severus used *by day and night* to gnash his teeth against Christians and revile the very name of Christ. His desire to wipe it off the face of the Gallic provinces and his determination utterly to overthrow the Christian Church led him at that time to *send* into the famous cities Lyon and Agen his *swashbucklers* (*gladiatores*) in search of Christians. By God's help faith was found fearless: strengthened by Christ, throngs of saints stood undaunted: for three days the sword smote, and Christ set his martyrs amid choirs of angels in the realms of heaven.

## II. CAPTURE OF ALBAN

At that time the emperor Severus made straight for Britain. On his entry into that group of provinces he began to inquire whether there were, in those farthest parts of the world, any that confessed the name of Christ. When the news flashed upon him that even there dwelt a multitude of Christians, *his habitual rage found vent in an order to smite them, one and all, with the sword*. A cleric fleeing from persecutors was heartily welcomed by Alban, who donned the cassock (*caracalla*) his guest was wearing and offered himself to be smitten in his stead. According to ancient tradition he was still a pagan. Forthwith he was brought before the impious Severus Caesar.

Though prayer was tantamount to confession of Christ before his recognition of the truth of Christianity, he did pray, saying: 'O Lord Jesu Christ, thou true Light, thou pearl of eternal price, thou *blazing Sun*, never to be quenched, of *Righteousness*, thou *dazzling Radiance*, thou *Spring and Source of reverent Love*, who drivest away none that cometh to thee: since hitherto I have not been worthy to receive the grace of thy baptism, let me, for thy name's sake, who knowest my innermost heart, be, by my confession and the outpouring of my blood, hallowed as a Christian. *From this race that lies before me let me not flinch*; but, while I confess that thou, the Lord Jesus Christ, art Son of God, lead me safe through to thy place of rest; because there dwell both thou and the ark of thy hallowing

strength. With righteousness let thy priests be clad and in goodness let thy saints exult ! ’

### III. TRIAL AND JUDGEMENT

While holy Alban was thus praying, the impious Caesar ordered his officers to prepare his throne of judgement. *At the conclusion of the prayer* he bade them *bring holy Alban into court.* To him he said: ‘What is thy name?’ Holy Alban answered: ‘Alban am I called.’ To him Caesar said: ‘Why dost thou, in contempt of our rules, so I hear, welcome as guests men whom thou knowest to be Christians, who heap insults on our gods and worship as God *one who was crucified by men?* Why dost thou want in sheer madness to give thyself up to superstition?’ Alban stood listening and carefully kept calm silence.

Again Caesar spake. ‘Alban, answer my questions! Slay and sacrifice to our most holy gods! To Jupiter and Apollo offer sacrifices!’ Alban answered: ‘With my whole mind I confess Christ, the Son of God. For the hand-made idols thou callest gods are *dumb and deaf, neither walk with their feet nor feel with their hands.* A common ruin awaits those *convicted demons* and their worshippers.’

To him replied Caesar: ‘Why art thou burning with froward zeal for Christianity? *Sacrifice to our gods and thou shalt be great in my palace.* Accept from me gold, silver and estates. The daughter of a famous senatorial house I bestow on thee in marriage.’ Alban answered: ‘*Thy gold and silver I refuse.* Abundance of estates and the daughter of a famous house I scorn like trash. From my confession of Christ thou wilt not make me swerve. Heaven and earth and sea He founded, and all that is therein.’

Quoth Caesar: ‘In the interest of thy youth and beauty sacrifice to the gods. *Beyond measure thy harsh speeches strain my patience* [S.], because not only on us but on the gods art thou heaping insults.’ Alban answered: ‘Already have I told thee that to thy gods I will not sacrifice, for *if by making to-day no addition to my sum total of good works I endanger the welfare of my soul, much more dangerous would it be for me to withdraw a good confession* [S.].’

Quoth Caesar: ‘Who taught thee this worthless religion?’ Alban answered: ‘One who is a priest for ever,

king of the heavens, founder of sea and earth, has himself taught me to distrust thy attempt to upset my faith. Thy advice I follow not. *Lo my flesh! Smite, slay, roast and devour it! Not one jot wilt thou make me budge from my confession of Christ!*

Then he pronounced sentence, delivered him to the soldiers, and so, after he had been beaten with rods, *ordered him to be thrust back into prison. On another day he again ordered him into court and said: 'Alban, sacrifice to our gods.'* Alban answered: 'Already I have told thee that I will not sacrifice. For they whom thou callest gods are no gods but are commonly known as demons.' Then Caesar *angrily delivered him to the executioners, saying: 'Unless to-day he sacrifice to the gods, cow him by changes of punishment; if ye find him incurably stubborn, we order you to give him the finishing sword stroke.'* Then, though he was being flogged, holy Alban gazed heavenward and gave thanks in these words: '*I thank thee, Jesu Christ, that for thy name's sake I thus publicly suffer. But because thou art Light eternal, grant me strength to bear every punishment.*' During his passion, while he was beaten with rods, he was through it all making fuller confession of Christ. The order was therefore given for the final swordstroke of his doom.

#### IV. THE RIVER MIRACLE

Between the city wall and the place of execution flowed a swift stream. Inspired, verily, by a divine summons, a huge multitude, *of both sexes, of every age and rank*, formed themselves into a guard of honour for the martyr. When, therefore, *he was led as a lamb to the slaughter* [S.] he saw the bridge so thronged that he and his escort could hardly cross it before evening. There was, in fact, left in the city no guard for the judge who had stayed there. *As it seemed a long while to wait for his arrival at the martyr's goal*, Alban betook himself to the torrent and turned his eyes heavenward. There and then, leaving its channel bare, the water retreated from his footsteps.

On his arrival at the place where he was doomed to die, the executioner ran with drawn sword to meet him, begging that he, the martyr's appointed smiter, might be punished in the martyr's stead. Flinging away his sword, he fell

prostrate at holy Alban's feet. 'Pray for me, I beseech thee,' he cried, 'to the Lord.' Then, filled with the Holy Spirit, and thanking God, holy Alban spent a full hour in prayer, saying: 'O Lord God, Father Almighty, who sendest away from thy kingdom none that believeth in thee; who to the robber on the cross, after he had but for one hour confessed Christ, didst forthwith open the gates of paradise; to this my fellow servant grant that by thy Holy Spirit the executioner may be transformed into a confessor, the heathen into a Christian. As for me, likewise also for my brother, who had come hither to smite me but has suddenly been transformed from my persecutor into my comrade, let a good confession of Thy Christ win his due measure of Thy grace.'

#### V. THE MIRACLE OF THE GUSHING SPRING

While the fell steel lay on the ground and there was among the executioners natural reluctance to act promptly, the holy martyr, followed by thronging crowds, climbed a hill which rises gently about five hundred paces from the place of execution. Unspeakably charming is its gorgeous floral raiment of every hue. Naught has it of steepness, no sheer uplift nor dizzy crag. To its sides, far and wide from its level summit, natural weathering gives an even slope. Long before it was hallowed by the shedding of holy blood it had doubtless been prepared for the martyr, whose saintliness is matched by its beauty. On the top of the hill holy Alban asked for a gift of water. Instantly, by a change of course that passes belief, before the martyr's feet gushed forth so steady a spring that all recognized the spontaneous effort even of the torrent to follow in the martyr's train. For the martyr himself could not possibly have been seeking on the lofty hilltop the water that had disappeared from the river. Finally, having rendered its due service and fulfilled its worshipful task, the stream left off bearing witness and returned to its normal course.

#### VI. EXECUTION AND SEQUEL

[There, accordingly, the brave martyr was beheaded, and received the crown of life which God has promised to them that love Him.] .

Methinks I must not pass by the fact that, while the executioner was bending to his task, his eyes fell to the ground with the head of the holy martyr. Such was his fate who laid godless hands on godly necks.

There also that other executioner, who was unwilling to smite a holy man of God, was himself smitten for confessing Christ. There is no doubt that he who thus shed his blood for Christ thereby earned through his good confession of Christ, even without the sacrifice of baptism, the full meed of martyrdom. [Although he was not washed in a baptismal font he was, nevertheless, so surely cleansed by bathing in his own blood that he became worthy to enter the kingdom of heaven.]

Then, gasping with fright and upset by the shock, that impious Caesar gave orders, even without the consent of the princes, to stop the persecution; and reported to them that the slaughter of saints tended rather to establish the religion they expected it to abolish.

#### VII. ST GERMAN AT ST ALBAN'S GRAVE

When holy German, bishop of Auxerre, had arrived at his basilica with relics of all the apostles and of several martyrs, intending to bury those precious gifts in the same place, he opened the tomb and gave order accordingly. His object was that, just as all saints are duly welcomed on equal terms in heaven, so their limbs, collected from several regions, might be fellow guests in one tomb.

Having reverently set them in right array, German carried away a load of dust from the place where the martyr's blood had flowed. His piety made him play the pilferer; but such sacrilege was purged of guilt by reverent love. Still stained with blood was that load: a clear proof that, when the persecutor turned pale, the earth had blushed. After these manifest disclosures a huge throng of people were, through the preaching of holy German the bishop and the excellent might of holy Alban, converted by favour of our Lord, to whom for ever belong honour and glory.

Done (Acta) on the 22nd day of June. Let us always thank God. Amen.



The river crossed by the martyr is the Ver, which formerly flowed through marsh land. The hill he climbed was called in Saxon times Holmhurst, and is now called Holywell Hill. The abbey church stands on the traditional scene of the execution. The first of the three miracles, the only one mentioned by Gildas, may be due to association of the martyrdom with some dim tradition of the prehistoric subsidence of a more widespread lake than the fishpool which was drained, in the reign of king Ethelred, by abbot Alfric. When his successor, abbot Ealdred, excavated the ruins of Verulam, his diggers found deeply buried fragments of shipping, such as oaken ribs smeared with pitch, rust-worn anchors and firwood oars. By abbot Michael, early in the reign of Edward III, a great vessel was found whole in the marsh.

The miracle of the gushing spring occurs so frequently in legends of saints that it probably has some connexion with the worship of river gods and well sprites. So truly Ovidian that it would have delighted that poet is the bold identification of spring with stream.

For the strange mishap that befell the actual executioner a source may be found in Tertullian's letter to the proconsul Scapula, written to dissuade him from persecuting the Christians of Africa. 'Vigellius Saturninus,' he tells him, naming the blind proconsul by whom the Scillitan martyrs were condemned, 'who first drew the sword upon us, lost his eyes.' In the same letter he praises the generous tolerance of Septimius Severus, whose death at York, on February 4, 211, was probably then recent.

That emperor had no colleagues who might have withheld their consent to his sudden change of policy. His sons Caracalla and Geta went with him to Britain, commanded the Roman legions there, and jointly succeeded him; but during his lifetime Caesar was their subordinate title and their father was the only prince (princeps). Our hagiographer must have had in mind the joint autho-

city under which he was, when he wrote, himself living, exercised in Gaul by the four sons of Clovis I after their father's death in the year of grace 511. The exact difference of meaning between *Caesar* and *princeps* was probably unknown to him, and one of the false canons of style then current was, if possible, not to use always the same word to denote the same thing. Inaccuracy was deemed a more venial fault than repetition.

The process is noteworthy by which *basilica*, the Greek word for royal, came to mean a building used for Christian worship. That adjective was originally applied to the portico or hall in which the Archon Basileus of Athens gave judgement in matters religious. From the fact that the Council of the Areopagus sometimes met there, *basilica* became the common word for a law court and was used in that sense by the Roman conquerors of Greece. In its developed form the building consisted of a rectangular area, divided by rows of columns into roofed aisles and a roofed or unroofed nave, with a roofed semi-circular apse at one end and an altar at the centre of the circle. Round the arc, with the praetor on his raised curule chair in their midst, sat the assessors. When such a building became a place of Christian worship, clergy sat in their stead and in his an enthroned bishop, the apsidal being also the western end of the *basilica*.

How widespread was the vogue of St Alban's legend in the foregoing shape appears from the fact that four copies have been found of an excerpt from it which does not name Severus and cuts the trial very short, but reproduces at full length the three miracles. The best copy, written in Gaul, is preserved at Autun; another, probably also written in Gaul, lies in the British Museum; the third, agreeing almost word for word with the second, was found at Einsiedeln, and may have been written in Southern Germany; the fourth and least accurate copy was written in England and is preserved in the library of Gray's Inn. The Autun

copy of the miracles or its lost twin brother was, by some competent scholar, again expanded into a complete Passion, from a lost copy of which Beda must have derived the account of the protomartyr which forms the seventh chapter in the first book of his Ecclesiastical History. A very corrupt copy of this redaction has been found in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, and is written with minuscules from which Professor Meyer infers that its date may be as early as the ninth century. The following is a faithful translation of the complementary matter added by the author to the excerpt from the original Passion. The phrases he copied are printed with italics.

## HERE BEGINS THE PASSION OF HOLY AND MOST BLESSED ALBAN THE MARTYR

### CAPTURE OF ALBAN

In a time of persecution, while mandates of cruel princes were raging against Christians, holy Alban, not yet *b-sprinkled with hallowing water*, but, *according to ancient tradition still a pagan, welcomed as his guest a certain cleric who was fleeing from persecutors*. While the stranger was being duly entertained, his prayers and vigils revealed God to holy Alban, who, perceiving his faith, suddenly abandoned the ceremonial of idolatry and became a most devout Christian.

When the intercourse of that cleric with his host had lasted some few days, fleet rumour suddenly entered the ears of the cruel prince and informed him that the holy man of God was lying hid in the home of holy Alban. Not yet, however, for the guest had a place of martyrdom been chosen. Hastily the prince put soldiers on his track and bade them bestir themselves to bring him into the imperial presence. On their arrival at the holy martyr's hovel, there and then holy Alban, clad in the *cassock* (caracalla) *worn by his guest and teacher*, presented himself in his stead to the soldiers, and *was straightway brought before the judge*.

## TRIAL AND JUDGEMENT

Just then incense was being burned, and from blazing altars rose ceremonial fragrance. At the sight of holy Alban being led bound towards him bestial rage inflamed him, because the host had, with presumptuous boldness, deemed it his duty to present to the soldiers himself instead of his guest. Forthwith he bade them lead the prisoner as far as the images of demons. Then the judge said to him: 'Be-cause, rather than present to the soldiers a sacrilegious rebel, thou hast chosen to hide him, in order to tantalize our wrath against a scorner of the gods, whatever penalties were due from him shall now be paid in full by thee, if thou dost shun our forms of worship.' Instead of quailing at the prince's threats holy Alban, equipped with spiritual armour, avowed himself resolute to set at naught the judge's orders, and determined that, *before his recognition of the truth of Christianity*, he would in the witness box *confess himself a Christian*.

Quoth the judge: 'Of what family art thou by birth?' Holy Alban answered: 'To thee it matters not how noble is my ancestry. But if thou dost wish to hear from me the truth, recognize now in me a Christian devoted to Christian duties.' Then said the judge to him: 'Thy name I ask; delay not to tell me!' Holy Alban answered: 'My kinsfolk call me Alban; as a Christian I worship God, who created all that lives on earth.' Furiously the judge said to him: 'If thou desirest the continuance of thy welfare, forsake not the sacrifices due to the great gods.' Quoth holy Alban: 'The sacrifices ye offer to demons can neither help the worshippers nor put within their grasp the boons they pray for. But whoever deliberately makes offerings to yonder images is a mere dupe of the Prince of Hell.' Enraged by these words the judge ordered holy Alban to be flogged by executioners in order that perchance lashes might subdue him to obedience. But holy Alban's endurance of agonizing pain seemed so steady that no penal treatment could break his resistance. Since, therefore, naught the judge could do availed to restrain him from Christian worship, *the order was given for the swordstroke of his doom*.

Between Beda's narrative and the excerpt thus pre-

faced the differences are, with the two exceptions already noted, merely rhetorical or verbal. He follows Gildas in identifying the persecutor with Diocletian, and quotes the following verse, written in the latter half of the sixth century by the poetaster Venantius Fortunatus, who became in old age bishop of Poitiers:

Albanum egregium fecunda Britannia profert .

Of which the equivalent English is:

Britannia, clad with fertile fields,  
Naught rarer than Saint Alban yields.

Or else:

Britannia bleak, of heroes fertile mother,  
Alban hath yielded. Whence comes such another ?

If we compare the two trial scenes, the former presents the characteristic feature which distinguished the later persecutions from the earlier. In the second century the first refusal of an accused Christian to worship a heathen deity was at once punished by sentence of death; in the third, repeated attempts were made to break his resolution, and he was treated rather as an adversary to be conquered than as an offender to be punished. This feature is less prominent in the latter of our trial scenes, which is also harsher in the quality of its emotion. Its inferiority to the former may well be proportional, or nearly so, to the debasement of poetic faculty during the long interval.

In the twelfth century Laudian manuscript of the Peterborough Chronicle Alban's martyrdom is assigned to the year 286. That entry was copied into the Parker manuscript of the Winchester and Canterbury Chronicle by an interpolator who changed the year to 288, perhaps with the deliberate intention of taking the event out of the reign of

Diocletian, which began in 284. Whatever persecution of Christians took place in either of those years was the consequence of a cruel edict published throughout the Empire by Aurelian in the year 275. In the same year he travelled through Gaul, but did not cross to Britain, and was, on his way to Persia, assassinated near Byzantium. Provincial governors continued after his death to obey the edict, which was subsidiary to his establishment in the preceding year of sun worship as the imperial religion. His mother was a priestess of the sun-god Mithras. Believing that he had, through the sun's help, permanently restored unity to the empire, he built on the Quirinal a temple of the sun, surpassing in magnificence all other Roman temples. His coinage bore an image of the sun with such inscriptions as Sol Dominus Imperi Romani. Among rolls of manuscript, said to have been found among the ruins of Verulam near the end of the tenth century, were several containing invocations and idolatrous rites, from which it appeared that the citizens had been zealous worshippers of the sun.

The basilica of St Alban, visited by St German, seems to have been destroyed, together with the Roman Verulam, by Saxon invaders. At the beginning of the eighth century, so we are assured by Beda, the martyr's tomb had been covered by another church, of such wondrous workmanship that it was a worthy memorial; and had not ceased to be a place of healing for sick folk. The new town that was growing in the neighbourhood then bore two names, Warlamcaster and Watlingcaster, which explain themselves.

Two extant charters attest the endowment by King Offa of the Benedictine monastery he founded there in 798. The earlier of the two was signed on May 4, 792, by the members of a Witenagemot assembled at Burford, namely, Higbert, the first and last archbishop of Lichfield; three bishops, Ceolwulf of Lindsey, Heathored of Hereford, and Unwona of Leicester; four Mercian abbots, one reeve and

eleven ealdormen. The later charter, professing to have been published by a Witenagemot held at Celchyth in 798, names Willegod as the first abbot, and bestows on the monastery exemptions much more extensive than are found in genuine charters. It is, therefore, if not altogether spurious, an interpolated version of the original document.

The social upheaval and general demoralization that followed the Norman invasion so diminished men's reverence for Alban and other English saints that fewer sufferers found healing at their tombs. Hardly any town then lacked its own local patron and venerable sanctuary, on which, in the service of God, humble craftsmen had lavished their skill; but of all these early saints the very names have long been forgotten. The ruthlessness of the Conqueror may be gathered from the short but significant record in the Chronicle, under the year 1070: 'In Lent the king let harry all the minsters that in England were.' Eleven years after the battle of Senlac, Lanfranc procured the election of his kinsman, Paul of Caen, as fourteenth abbot of St Alban's. By him the excellent Roman tiles recovered from the ruins of Verulam by his predecessors, Ealdred and Eadmer, were used in the building of a new church, a copy of St Peter's, Caen.

In the year 1146, the sixteenth abbot, Geoffrey de Gorham, was succeeded by an Englishman named Radulf Gubiuu, who, before he became a monk, had been confidential clerk of the Bishop of Lincoln. The office he first held in the monastery was the curatorship of the Archives, which were kept in the Scriptorium or Copying Room, one of Paul's additions to the fabric. For three centuries, till in the year 1480 John Herford set up a printing press in the Abbey, that room was the most prolific source in England of theology, hagiography and history. Among the many who there faithfully laboured to preserve the records of the past the most famous are Roger of Wendover, Mat-

thew Paris, John of Tynemouth and Thomas Walsingham. The ordinary routine of copying and illuminating psalters, gospels, service books, missals, lives of saints, and of recording current events, occupied in course of time from a dozen to a score of scribes. Radulf was a true lover of books, and spared no pains in collecting volumes to enrich the library which his Norman predecessors had established. Among them were doubtless the historical works of William of Malmesbury, Florence of Worcester, Alfred of Beverley, Simeon of Durham and Geoffrey of Monmouth.

On the death of the eighteenth abbot, Robert de Gorham, the abbey was found to be so deeply in debt that its landed property was for a time sequestrated by the King's Justiciar. Of three candidates for the vacant abbacy, whose names were submitted to the king, Henry chose Simon the prior, who justified the choice by his liberality to the Scriptorium. There one of the monks, named William, wrote, in obedience to the abbot, the fullest extant account of the protomartyr. The model of this interesting hagiographical romance was doubtless the *Historia Britonum*, written by Geoffrey of Monmouth and dedicated to the Robert, duke of Gloucester, who died in 1147. Like Geoffrey William professes to be merely the translator of an ancient document; but whereas Geoffrey's fabulous author wrote in Welsh, William's wrote, so he avers, in English. He admits that he himself found in the *Historia Britonum* the name Amphibalus of Alban's clerical guest. In a later passage of that work Geoffrey says that a British king named Constantine, the successor of Arthur, slew before the altar, in the Church of St Amphibalus at Winchester, whither he had fled for sanctuary, one of the sons of Modred, and the other before the altar of a church in London. As there was in Winchester no such church, Geoffrey must have blundered and misled William. It so happens that the blunder can be traced to its source. The word Amphibalus is the Greek name of a chasuble or some similar clerical garment,



thrown round the shoulders. According to Gildas, Constantine slew amid sacred altars, while they were sheltering *beneath the amphybalus of a holy abbot*, two royal youths. It seems, therefore, clear that Geoffrey misread or misunderstood a passage, possibly corrupt or mutilated, in his copy of that earlier account of the woes of Britain. The word was commonly used in Gaul, long before the time of Gildas, and bears witness to the derivation of Gallic Christianity from Eastern Christendom. By a curious coincidence the name caracalla, given in the first *Passio Sancti Albani* to the garment of the martyr's guest, has become the historic nickname of the Roman emperor who set the fashion of wearing it. In his prologue the fabulous author of the narrative summarized below states that he dares not, for fear of his heathen neighbours, prefix to it his name and that he chooses rather by silence to suffer loss of fame than to risk both fame and life. On the tottering walls of Verulam he had found engraved a description of Alban's martyrdom.

Fleeing from persecution in Gaul, Amphybalus crossed, like Julius Caesar, from Boulogne to Richborough. Thence he travelled along Watling Street, through London to Verulam and there entered the stately villa of Alban, whose illustrious Roman ancestry was matched by his wealth and official dignity; but of the divine sonship of Christ he knew nothing. When the slaves were out of hearing he asked his guest how, being a Christian, he had come so far in safety. 'My Lord Jesus Christ,' was the answer, 'Son of the living God, has protected me in the midst of danger, in order that by preaching to the heathen I may prepare for Him an acceptable people.' He then described to his host, in the words of St Luke, how ancient prophecy had been fulfilled by the Annunciation and Incarnation. 'He that made flesh became flesh. If thou becomest a Christian, thou wilt be able to succour the weak, the ailing and all who are in evil plight: no mishap will harm thee;

until God so wills death will not come nigh thee. As the herald of thy martyrdom have I entered this city. With heavenly life will Christ reward thy kindness to me.'

In the doctrine of the Trinity, next expounded by Amphibalus, Alban found so insuperable an obstacle that he waxed wroth. 'Thou ravest: reason refutes thy creed. If the men of this city hear thee talk such nonsense, they will, in accordance with our laws, behead thee in punishment of thy blasphemy.' Left alone, Amphibalus spent the whole night in prayer.

Sleeping in an attic, Alban was troubled by a vivid dream of Christ's passion, resurrection and ascension. On awaking, he rose from bed, went downstairs and related the vision to his kneeling guest in the language of the Gospels. Amphibalus then showed his perplexed host the cross he was wearing, and so clearly expounded the doctrine of the Atonement that Alban professed himself fully convinced, kissed the cross, shed on it tears mingled with blood, and, in a voice quivering with emotion, solemnly renounced the Devil.

After expressing his joy that Alban had been converted by a direct revelation, Amphibalus prepared to continue his journey, but was, by urgent entreaties for fuller instruction, persuaded to stay till the end of the week. In order to conceal their conferences they met after sunset in a hovel, far enough from the villa to escape observation, and there spent the night together jointly praising God at frequent intervals.

So vain were those precautions that a heathen, who had been playing the spy, informed the judge and spitefully did his utmost to enrage him against them. The judge gave orders that they were to be summoned to offer sacrifice to the heathen gods, and, in the event of their refusal, to be arrested, bound and slain on the altar. Hearing a rumour of what was in store for them, Alban gave Amphibalus a cloak embroidered with gold, started him before dawn

along Watling Street towards Wroxeter-on-Severn, and himself donned his guest's cassock (*caracalla*).

Soon afterwards the villa was noisily searched by a band of soldiers, who at last found Alban in a hovel kneeling before the cross. To their rude question, 'Where is that scoundrel cleric?' he answered, 'With God, who guards him so well that he fears not man's threats. Why seek ye him?' They promptly arrested him, handled him roughly and led him to the idols, round which were assembled the judge and a group of citizens. Having never before seen the like, they were scared by the cross which Alban held aloft.

After his dialogue with the judge, very similar to the one Beda copied, Alban refused to sacrifice and was scourged by lictors till their arms flagged. In the hope of breaking his resolution, the judge kept him in custody for six months. A severe drought punished this injustice, and was attributed by the citizens to Christian magic. Messengers were sent in all directions to summon a jury of men who were endowed with wisdom, office and wealth. Into their assembly Alban was brought barefoot from his foul dungeon. After hearing him they pronounced him innocent. His influential kinsfolk began to agitate in his favour. His fetters were unclasped, in order that he might stand free to plead before the judge. Fearing that he might after all be cheated of his martyrdom, Alban prayed, taunted the irresolute citizens and poured on the idols a torrent of scorn. He was then unanimously sentenced to death and followed to Holmhurst, the place of execution, by an insolent crowd. In crossing the Ver some of them were drowned, but, after Alban's prayer had caused the water to stand up in a heap, were by him revived. The conversion of his custodian so enraged them that they savagely mauled that soldier and gave their sungod the credit of the miracle. The gushing spring rewarded Alban's prayer for his persecutors, but was also attributed by them to their sungod.

•

After the martyr's flowing curls had been so tightly bound to a branch of a tree that he dangled in mid air his head was severed and left hanging while his body fell into the pit that had been dug for it. His cross, sprinkled with blood, fell on the grass, but was picked up and hidden by a Christian onlooker. The executioner's eyes leapt from their sockets to the ground.

•Meanwhile the converted soldier, who had been left prostrate at the foot of the hill, crawled up on hands and knees. The judge, drawn to the scene by a rumour of the miracles, scoffingly bade him beseech Alban to mend his broken bones. 'Run! make haste! fix the head to the body!' The soldier surprised everybody by obeying the order and soon recovered strength enough to bury the corpse he had united. He was, therefore, regarded by the furious mob as a magician who could not be slain in any ordinary way, was torn to pieces, limb by limb, and finally beheaded. Having thus inflamed their lust for blood, they departed from the scene of slaughter, raising the cry, 'Woe (Vae) to the Judge!'

After nightfall a cross rose skyward from the martyr's grave, and a choir of angels, descending and ascending, sang the refrain:

Albanus vir egregius  
Martyr extat gloriosus.

Of which the equivalent English is:

Alban, a man of rare renown,  
Hath won the martyr's glorious crown.

One of the beholders, converted by the bright vision, proposed to the others that they go in search of Amphilbalus. They found him preaching in Wales, that is, in non-Roman Britain, and showed him the cross he had given to Alban, stained with the martyr's blood. His convincing eloquence soon won him the satisfaction of baptizing them

all. The news of this event so vexed the rulers of Verulam that, after enquiring which citizens were missing, they made a list of their names and sent an armed force in pursuit. They found Amphibalus surrounded by his new converts, threatened them with death unless they recanted, and, after one had answered on behalf of all, put the threat into execution. Son was slain by father, father by son, brother by brother. Amphibalus himself they bound and drove barefoot in front as they returned on horseback to Verulam. There was much bitter weeping and many a backward glance of regret for slain kinsfolk and friends. By healing a sick man whom they found lying by the wayside Amphibalus converted all the slayers. They halted for the night in view of their city walls. The disappointment and mourning inside the city turned to rage against that missionary, until the mourners were assured by the slayers that death is merely the gateway of life. One of the party described the slaughter and also his vision of Christ welcoming the slain.

Of those martyrs many were too disfigured to be recognized; but, after Amphibalus had prayed, their wounds closed up and the clotted gore looked like milk. When the Welsh of the neighbourhood refused to let them be buried there, a wolf and an eagle mounted guard and drove off the bears and vultures that would else have devoured the corpses. At so strange a sight the churlish Welsh marvelled and trembled; then thanked God for so hallowing their land and paid due honour to Amphibalus.

Moved by the judge's loud and angry indignation against Amphibalus the heathen populace of Verulam armed themselves and streamed northwestward along Watling Street to meet him. Some, who, by taking a short cut, were the first to find him, laid bare his entrails with swords, bound him to a stake and bade him walk round it. As he gave no sign of pain, they stabbed with knives what was left of his body. He bore it all so lightly that he looked quite merry

(*hilari vultu*). Several of his assailants, sharply pricked by remorse, renounced idols, submitted themselves to Christ and begged their victim to pray for them. A party of spies sent by the prince (*princeps*) then arrived on the scene, slew a large number of that second batch of converts, reproached Amphibalus and invited him to recant, but were by him threatened with dire retribution. They retaliated by stoning him to death and continued to stone his dead body, which his weary and hungry companions felt too exhausted to rescue. His murderers then began to fight one another, and a Christian bystander took advantage of the confusion to remove and bury his corpse.

The combatants were struck with sudden paralysis and the judge lost his wits. None went unpunished of those who had wronged Amphibalus. Finally all the citizens embraced Christianity, and many of them went to Rome as penitent pilgrims.

It seems fair to believe that William has preserved for us many details of genuine local tradition which were unknown to Gildas and the earlier framers of the protomartyr's legend; but the line between the credible and the incredible will be diversely drawn, according to temperament, by different minds. It has, from time immemorial, been supposed that Lichfield owes its name to the corpses which were so well guarded by the wolf and the eagle.

The foregoing legend was versified by John Lydgate in his poem, 'Alban and Amphobel.'

## CHAPTER II. NINIAN OF WHITHORN, APOSTLE OF THE PICTS

IN PARADISO ECCLESIAE  
VIRTUTUM EX DULCEDINE  
SPIRAMEN DAT AROMATUM  
NINIANUS CAELESTIUM.

(The Garden of Eden was not more deliciously scented by spice-laden breezes than the Church of Christ has been by Ninian's holy and strenuous life.)

**L**ONG before the time of Columkille, so they say, the southern Picts, who dwelt on the near side of the Mounth, abandoned idolatrous error and welcomed the true faith. The word was preached to them by Nynias, a very venerable and holy man, whose folk were Brythons. At Rome, in a monastic community (regulariter), he had been fully instructed in the true faith and its mysteries. The see of his bishopric is famous for the church which bears the name of holy bishop Martin; there, in company with many other saints, rests in the body Ninian himself; the place has now for some time been under English rule and forms part of the province Bernicia. It is commonly called Near the White House (Ad Candidam Casam), because there he built a stone church, in a style to which Brythons were not accustomed.

Of the great missionary who is to-day commemorated, in twenty-five counties of Scotland, by more than seventy dedications of churches or altars, Beda tells us that much, based on hearsay, and no more, in a chapter which is merely introductory to his account of Aidan. The site of Candida Casa, overlooking Solway Firth, is the Leukopibia or Leukoikidia of Ptolemy, the modern Whithorn or Whithern. All these names have the same meaning

In many Irish Kalendars Ninian's name is prefixed by the affectionate *Mo*, which means *my*. Thus Angus the Cul-dee calls him *Moinend*, the Shout of every Mouth. According to Irish tradition, a vision repeatedly seen by his mother and kinsfolk caused him to cross from Whithorn to Leinster, with a band of disciples, for whom he built a monastery at Cluain Conaire, on fair and fit land granted him by the local chieftain. *Futerna* is the Irish form of Whithorn, and *Rosnat*, which means a seagirt promontory, the Irish name of the monastery.

Ninian's death has been dated, but not with certainty, September 16, 432. Amid the ensuing turmoil of strife, the light he had kindled in that white landmark continued thence to shine. Less than a century later, Enda of Aran was there trained by abbot Manchan and Finnian of Moville by abbot Mugint. Another of the abbots, Cairnech, is said to have been the first monk of Erin, his father being a Brython chieftain named Sanan and his mother a daughter of Loarn, king of Alba, the land of the northern Picts.

The veneration bestowed in the eighth century on the founder of Candida Casa appears in the following message addressed by Alcuin, then a deacon, to the English monks who were there serving God:

'I beseech you to unite in affectionate remembrance of me and to pray on my behalf in the church of your holy father bishop Ninian, whose many deeds of power have shed lustre on his name. The holiness of the doer has lately become known to me by reading a poem about them which was given me by my faithful pupils in the school of the church of York.'

The loss of this poem, which was doubtless written in Latin, has probably not deprived us of much trustworthy information.

In the ninth century a fresh horde of Gaels crossed from



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Ireland to Galloway, the land of the Gallgael, or mixed Gael.

In the twelfth century a long account of Ninian was written by Ailred, a Cistercian monk of Rievaulx, whose father and grandfather, both named Eilaf and both priests, had inherited the charge of Wilfrith's magnificent church at Hexham. Ailred himself visited Galloway, and found the local chieftain angry with his sons, the sons jointly enraged against their father and severally each against his brothers. In that wild forest-clad region the tall Galwegians were living more like brute beasts than men. Among professing Christians most were kept from falling by the example and monition of their leaders; few were able to stand alone. The king of Scotland had failed to quell, and the bishop of Whithorn to soothe, the fierce and bloodthirsty strife that rent asunder the ruling family, but tactful Ailred proved himself so powerful a peacemaker that the father, whose slain foes were numbered by thousands, ended by donning the frock of a monk. From this glimpse of Ninian's folk we may gather how hard was the task he tackled.

The aim of Ailred in writing about Ninian was rather to edify than to inform, and his rhetoric is of the tediously diffuse kind then fashionable; but the whole narrative glows with fervent and genuine piety. He used, so he says, an account, now lost, of the miracles written 'in barbaric language,' that is, either in Gaelic or Northumbrian English, probably the latter. Ninian, he tells us, was the son of a Romanized Christian chieftain and a pattern of boyish virtue, devoted to his Latin Bible and so eager for more light than his teachers could shed on its meaning that he persuaded his kinsfolk to send him to the source of such light, the see of the Apostles Peter and Paul. His home was probably near the northern or southern shore of Solway Firth.

If, as we may fairly assume, Ninian arrived in Rome early in the last quarter of the fourth century, he witnessed the fateful process by which, for good or evil, ancient

pagan ritual was forcibly diverted from its own channel into the lifestream of the Catholic Church. In the new temples, as in the old, art, pictorial, plastic and textile, became the handmaid of religion. How completely, until that time, Christianity had been confined to towns and cities, appears from the fact that the old nature worship was first called *religio paganorum*, the religion of peasants, in a law of the year 368, promulgated by the sincerely orthodox but generously tolerant emperor Valentinian I. The growing fashion of pilgrimage to the shrines of Rome was encouraged by Pope Damasus, who opened up the catacombs and made them easily accessible. It can hardly be doubted that the walls of those dim underground galleries often echoed the tread of Ninian's feet, as he mused the pathetic story of the past and strove to hear, amid the silence, spiritual voices.

In the season of Lent he must often have witnessed the elaborate preparation of catechumens for baptism. The course of instruction began in the third week of the fast and was held on seven different days. At Mass, after the collect and before the lessons, a deacon called them by name and bade them kneel in prayer. After they had responded aloud and signed themselves with the cross, repeating the formula, In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one of the clergy exorcized first the men, then the women, signing the cross on their foreheads and placing his hands on them as he pronounced the formula of exorcism, which was repeated after him by a second and third exorcist. 'Recognize thy doom,' said they, 'thou accursed Devil, and pay honour to the living and true God, to His Son Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Ghost. Hold aloof from these members of God's household, whom he hath deigned to call, by the gift of baptism, into a holy state of grace. This sign of the holy Cross which we place on their foreheads never dare, thou accursed Devil, to desecrate by doing them harm.'

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After the three exorcists had passed, the catechumens again knelt, prayed and crossed themselves. Then came a priest, who again signed them with a cross on their foreheads and laid his hands on them, saying a short prayer for their enlightenment, sanctification and perseverance. After a final prostration the catechumens resumed their place and were present while the office continued, but left the church just before the reading of the Gospel. On all seven days of the Scrutiny, as the ceremony was called, except the last, the same ritual was repeated. The third day was of special importance. Then the candidate was formally introduced to the Gospel, Symbol or Creed and Lord's Prayer. The ceremony was called Opening of the Ears, and is so emphatically praised by Beda in two passages of his allegorical expositions that we may fairly infer his familiarity with the use of the whole Scrutiny in the Northumbrian offshoot of the Roman stem. Four deacons came in procession from the sacristy, each holding one of the four Gospels. They advanced to the altar and placed one at each corner. A priest explained the meaning of the Gospel as a whole; then, while the candidates stood, one of the deacons read and the priest expounded the first pages of each Gospel one after another. The delivery of the Creed was likewise preceded and followed by explanation from the mouth of the priest. Finally the Paternoster was delivered by the priest himself, who began with a general exhortation and then explained it phrase by phrase. On the seventh and last of the days, namely Easter Eve, no mere exorcist but a priest adjured Satan for the last time, and proceeded to perform the Effeta or Opening. After moistening his finger with spittle he touched the nostrils and ears of each candidate, repeating the formula, 'Begone, thou Devil, for the Doom of God is at hand.' Then the candidates so loosened their garments that they might be anointed on breast and back with exorcized oil. This was the critical moment of their strife with Satan; first the symbolical

release of their organs of speech and hearing, then the symbolical preparation for their athletic contest. One by one they faced the priest.

‘Dost thou renounce Satan?’ ‘I do renounce.’

‘And all his works?’ ‘I do renounce.’

‘And all his pomp?’ ‘I do renounce.’

Then they recited the Creed, knelt, prayed and were dismissed by the archdeacon.

On the vigil of Easter Day the baptismal ceremony began with a reading of twelve important passages of Scripture, each followed by a prayer and the singing of appropriate canticles. Then the Pope and his clergy, together with the elect catechumens, marched in procession to the famous baptistery of the Lateran, which still exists. Before him were borne two large lighted tapers; the singing of a litany opened the ceremony. Then followed the dignified prayer of benediction which is still in use, thrice interrupted to make the sign of the cross over or in the water, once to blow upon the water. At the moment when the prayer for the descent of the Holy Spirit ended, the carriers of the tapers plunged them into the piscina or pool. Then the Pope poured from an ampulla, or flask, consecrated chrism on the water in the form of a cross. Next the candidates were presented to him by the archdeacon and thrice answered ‘I believe,’ to the questions:

‘Believest thou in God the Father Almighty?’

‘Believest thou also in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, who was born and suffered?’

‘Believest thou also in the Holy Ghost, in Holy Church, in the remission of sins, in the resurrection of the flesh?’

Each candidate entered the piscina, which was not deep enough to reach the head of any; and thrice, namely after each clause, placed his head under a jet of water, while the Pope pronounced the formula:

‘I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.’

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Confirmation followed, the newly baptized being anointed on the head, as they emerged from the piscina, with a mixture of oil and scented chrism, by a priest who said a short prayer. Finally they formed groups in the front of the Pope, who signed on each the cross dipped in chrism, saying, 'Peace be unto thee.' The procession then reformed and re-entered the basilica, where throughout the night the Scola Cantorum had been chanting litanies and repeating the invocations. The Pope prostrated himself before the altar, rose and began the first Easter Mass by intoning the *Gloria in Excelsis*. Before the end of the canon he blessed the drink of water, milk and honey, which it was the rule to give every neophyte after his or her first communion. Day dawned as this majestic and imposing ceremony came to an end.

Throughout the octave of Easter the neophytes wore the white robes they had put on when they emerged from the piscina. Every day they attended Mass in the morning and also communicated. In the evening they attended vespers, which ended with a kind of pilgrimage accompanied by chants. They marched in procession to the baptistery and the consignatory.

Whenever he attended Mass Ninian saw bread and wine offered by all the worshippers, from the Pope downwards. Before the breaking of bread a fragment consecrated at the last Mass was dropped into the chalice. After the communion fragments of the newly consecrated bread were taken to other churches for the beginning of their next Masses, and a fragment was reserved for the next papal Mass. Thus impressively was typified the unity of the Church and the continuity of Christ's presence therein.

The young pilgrim must have been dazzled by the soaring and spreading glory, as yet undimmed, of the colossal marble palaces, baths and amphitheatres, in which three centuries of Caesars had crystallized the labour and skill of untold myriads of enslaved toilers. While, beyond the

northern mountain barrier of the empire, lurked the gathering avalanche of Vandal, Goth and Hun, the doomed citizens, enervated with sloth and luxury, bathed, donned gaudy clothes, feasted, danced, threw dice, lounged and jested with reckless and riotous gaiety. Under the dome of the Circus Maximus the fascinating chariot races of rival factions cast their spell on 380,000 excited, almost frenzied, onlookers. The silken awnings of the Colosseum throbbed with the deafening din of 90,000 brutal shouters, whose gloating eyes devoured the death agony of man and beast in the slippery arena. Yet behind it all lay an extensive background of rational sobriety and serious, even lofty, thought. Many devout and philosophic minds clung to the Persian cult of Mithras, whose worshippers were ascetic in life, lofty and fervent in faith. By the Manichees, including Augustine, a higher standard of morals was then maintained than by the hypocritical Christian clergy of Rome and the silly women they led captive. Rescripts of the austere Valentinian I had forbidden these waterless clouds to enrich themselves by the gifts of penitents or to enter the houses of widows and spinsters. Ninian probably dwelt in one of the collegiate houses shared by companies of the stricter clergy, whose rule of life was monastic. Among the ruling classes the large majority of professing Christians indulged in a sumptuousness of dress and display which was very far removed from the simplicity of the apostolic age. A notable exception was the famous group of ladies in the palace of Marcella on the Palatine Hill, of whom Jerome was the guest and spiritual guide. His natural disgust at the prevalent corruption carried him too far in the opposite direction. About the time of Ninian's birth that native of Dalmatia had been laying, in the Roman grammar school of Donatus, the foundation of his literary eminence. If these two barbarians met the younger doubtless owed much to the influence of the elder.

But, from the name of his church, it appears that the best

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of young Ninian's hero-worship was bestowed on another barbarian from the east, namely Martin, the strenuous and fearless bishop of Tours, to whom Ruskin paid the following tribute:

‘ You are to understand, first of all, that the especial character of St Martin is a serene and meek charity to all creatures. He is not a preaching saint,—still less a persecuting one: not even an anxious one. Of his prayers we hear little—of his wishes, nothing. What he does always, is merely the right thing at the right moment; rightness and kindness being in his mind one.’

It seems probable that after Jerome's departure to Bethlehem Ninian left Rome for Milan, the see of Ambrose, and thence made his way to Tours. In a secluded retreat about two miles from that city, between the river Loire and a lofty hill, the bishop had built himself a wooden cell around which clustered eighty others, the homes of his disciples and the nucleus of Marmoutier (*Magnum Monasterium*). None called aught that he used his own; prayer was the chief task of the elder brethren, copying manuscripts of the younger. Their food was plain and their dress coarse. Many of them afterwards became bishops and followed the example of Martin by spreading the faith among the peasants of Gaul. There, probably, sated with Rome, Ninian spent the best years of his preparation to follow the recent example of Ulfilas, the great apostle of the Goths, by converting the heathens of his own land.

Of especial interest to Ninian, as tending to cause anarchy in the neighbourhood of his home, was the defeat and death at Aquileia, in the year 388, of the too ambitious Maximus, who had ruled for five years the provinces of Gaul and Britain. In 390 the treacherous massacre of Visigoths at Thessalonica was followed by the dramatic self-abasement of Theodosius before Ambrose in the cathedral of Milan. Perhaps in later years the memory of that event, which he may

have seen with his own eyes, made Ninian equally bold in withstanding braggart chieftains who had likewise sinned against knowledge. One such, Tuduval, is described by Ailred as a stubborn thwarter of that apostle until he was humbled by grievous illness. Probably, moreover, he was old enough to remember the successful campaign in North Britain which had given that great Spaniard, under the eyes of his father, his first taste of warfare. To Theodosius the Church owes the first ecumenical Council of Constantinople, held in the year 381, which completed the triumph of Athanasian over Arian doctrine. To him also is due the distinction between catholic and heretic and the definition of those names; the permanent alliance between Church and State; and the systematic pressure of persecution which ultimately crushed both heresy and overt heathenism. •

It was probably the great Vandal Stilicho who enabled Ninian to make a successful beginning of his mission by giving him, as an escort, the legion which, in the year 398, soon after the death of Martin, cleared the Picts from the region between the two Roman walls. The Attacotti who dwelt there were then enrolled as Roman soldiers and afterwards remained peaceful. Protected by them, Ninian may well have built his basilica of stone as early as the year 399. He ministered first to the Picts of Galloway, in the district between the Nith and the Irish Channel, and later, by unflinching boldness and patient perseverance, won over to the true faith the main body of Southern Picts. From the Confession of St Patrick, if his birthplace may be identified with Dumbarton, it appears that there had been, at least from the beginning of the fourth century, a Christian priesthood at work under the ægis of Rome, on the banks of the Clyde; but that, near the beginning of the fifth, there was in that neighbourhood a general relapse into heathendom.

From Ailred we learn that he established a school for boys and maintained, though with much difficulty, strict discipline. In his missionary journeys he had with him a band of



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clergy, to some of whom he assigned the charge of new converts at each stage, while he and the main body passed on to the next. The tribal organization of society made it expedient, perhaps imperative, first to win over the local chieftain. From the visible traces of his work that remain it appears that he valued the sea route of the Inner Hebrides as a means of communication and placed groups of converts within easy reach of the west coast. From the absence of dedications it may be inferred that he made no impression on the ancient Dalriada, the modern Argyle. The church in Mull which bears his name was really founded by Ninnidh, who, in the year 523, gave dying Brigid her last house. His work among the Southern Picts probably began soon after the final departure of the Roman garrison, that is, early in the second decade of the fifth century. Then their hordes swarmed at will over the rampart of Antonine into the temptingly fertile Lowlands.

Beneath a cliff of Luce Bay, clad with clinging samphire, opens the cave which is called St Ninian's and was his favourite retreat when he needed the refreshment of lonely communion with God. Though cliffs and shore have a westerly aspect, the cave opens southward, about twenty-five feet above the level of high-tide. Excavations in the years 1883 and 1884 disclosed many quaint crosses graven on displaced stones, perhaps by the masons Ninian brought with him from Tours. Three miles is the distance of the cave from the traditional site of the basilica they built.

Soon after the year 731 Pehthelm of Malmesbury became the first English bishop of Candida Casa. In succession to him came Frithwald, Pehtwine (764-777), Ethelbert and Badulf, who was consecrated in 790 and seems to have been the last of that line. From 1154 to 1359 Candida Casa was a suffragan see of York. In the latter year Pope Innocent VI assumed control and appointed the first of the bishops whose administration covered the period (1378 to 1417) of the disastrous schism in the papacy, and lasted beyond the

year 1428, in which James I granted a general protection to all strangers entering Scotland on pilgrimage to Ninian's church. The constant stream of such pilgrims had begun even in Ailred's time, but no Chaucer has enshrined their gaiety in undying verse. Among them, in 1473, were Margaret, the good queen of James III, and six ladies of her chamber, who were presented with new livery gowns for the occasion. In 1516 the Regent Albany granted a safe conduct to all persons of England, Ireland and the Isle of Man to come by land or water into Scotland, in honour of St Ninian, to his church.

With the Reformation began a rapid decay of interest in the traditions which had, for eleven centuries, been gathering round the shrine which covered his marble cist. The lands of the church became the prey of spoilers; legal penalties were enacted against pilgrims. Nevertheless, the ruined priory of Whithorn, a few miles north of Burrow Head, overlooking Wigtown Bay eastward and Luce Bay westward, still marks the spot where ancient Roman civilization and more ancient pre-Pictish barbarism both gave way before the prevailing power of the Holy Spirit; where the imperial sway of the Eternal City, wielded by Pope instead of Caesar, laid firm hold on one of the most virile Keltic tribes; where Scotie learning thrived; where English bishops repaired the breaches made by devastating warfare; where, year after year, English and Scots forgot their feuds in sharing a common reverence; where the devout James IV braced his spirit to atone for his father's death by going with an iron girdle of penance round his waist to the fatal field of Flodden.

At Whithorn is a great upright stone, and at Kirkmadrine two such stones, which were probably set up in the time of Ninian. On each stone is the symbol ☒; on the first are the words, *Petri Apustoli*, rudely carved; on the second the inscription, *A et Ω, hic iacent sancti et praecepti sacerdotes id est Viventius et Mavorius*; on the third the two names, *(Piu) s et Florentius*.

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In Cumberland also and Westmorland there are traces of Ninian's activity. The church dedicated to him at Brougham is commonly called Ninekirks. He must, therefore, be regarded as the patron saint of the well in the cemetery of Brampton, which is called Ninewells; and the more surely as a neighbouring oak is named St Martin's in a map of the year 1603. Finally, at Fenton, four miles from Wooler, in Northumberland, is a chapel dedicated to St Ninian, and a well called by his name. A fair is held there on his festival. His church at Whitby is modern, but stands on the site of a very ancient one.

The pious Nonjurors of Aberdeenshire used to express their reverence for this ancient apostle by giving his name to their sons. Ringan, a corrupt form thereof, is familiar to readers of the Waverley novels. Thanks to the recent revival of catholic thought and feeling in the Established Church of Scotland many new parish churches and chapels are called St Ninian's.



ST. NINIAN'S CAVE



### CHAPTER III

#### KENTIGERN, FOUNDER OF GLASGOW AND ST ASAPH'S

Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee.  
Jeremiah, i, 5.

**T**HE Glasgow station St Enoch took its name, by the dropping of a T, from an unwedded mother Thenew or Thaney; and the Lothians are named after her enraged father, Loth, a Brython chieftain, who, in the second decade of the sixth century, set her adrift at nightfall, in a frail curach of wickerwork and hide, on the Firth of Forth, at the mouth of the river Aberlessie, where heaps of fish lying dead on the sand caused a most foul stench. At dawn the curach grounded high up the Forth, near Culross, on the northern shore. Immediately after landing she began to suffer the pangs of travail, gathered a few faggots, laid them on some embers which the north wind had rekindled, and was there delivered of a son. As she lay weak and helpless, moaning and sobbing, a party of peasants passed that way and were moved with compassion. Some stoked her fire, others gave her food, the rest went straight to a holy priest named Serf, the abbot of a monastic school, who had that very morning, while the boy was being born, heard in his oratory strange music that reminded him of the Gloria in Excelsis sung on the eve of the birth of Jesus by the angels at Bethlehem. The news brought him by the peasants seemed at first too good to be true, then caused him to thank God. From that day forward he cherished both mother and child as his own kindred. Having duly mingled olive oil and balsam, he baptized and anointed the boy, naming him, in presage of his future greatness, Kentigern, which means Chief Ruler;

but he called him by the pet name Munghu or Mungo, which means gentle and dear. His growth in grace was, like Samuel's, swift and steady; no tree planted by the water-side ever bore fairer fruit. He was a quick and eager learner; his wit was nimble, his memory retentive, his talk clear and persuasive. His melodious, high-pitched treble voice never tired of singing the praises of God. The scene of his birth became afterwards the site of a memorial chapel; and in the town Alloa close by, on the steeple of St Mungo's Church, a quaint effigy of him watches, as it were, over the sleepers in the churchyard below.

The more young Mungo deserved his master's favour, the more he became, like Joseph, an object of malicious envy to his schoolmates; neither in public nor in private could they speak to him a civil word. Not content with reviling him, they made his life a burden by laying for him every kind of snare that perverted ingenuity could suggest, and on two recorded occasions tried in vain to saddle him with the blame of their own misdeeds.

Serf had a pet robin, so tame that it fed from his hand and perched on his head or shoulders, chirping or flapping its wings while he read or prayed. Its prompt obedience to his slightest sign was a mute reproach to the slackness of his lazy pupils. One day, at the usual hour, he entered his oratory to offer, on behalf of all, the fragrant incense of prayer. No sooner was his back turned than the most mischievous of those idlers caught his robin and snatched it so rudely one from another that it fell to the ground ruffled and lifeless. Aching at the near prospect of a severe caning, they threw their victim away from themselves towards Mungo, who took it tenderly in his hands, made on it the sign of the cross and prayed earnestly for its recovery. Forthwith it revived, spread its wings and, as the abbot came out of the oratory, flew as usual to meet him.

The duty of trimming and feeding the lamps of their church was assigned, for a week at a time, to each boy in

turn. In one of Mungo's weeks his spiteful mates, choosing the eve of a festival, rose from bed at midnight and stealthily put out every light in the whole range of buildings; then crept back to bed. The butt of this devilish prank rose as usual at cockcrow and was at first so disheartened thereby that he started to run right away; but pulled himself together at the boundary hedge and turned back. After making on a sprig of hazel the sign of the cross and blessing it in the threefold Name, he contrived so to kindle it that he relighted all the lamps. A hazel tree, accordingly, is the central figure of the device which adorns the shield of the city of Glasgow; and on the top of it stands a lively robin. Beneath it, in mid air, hangs the fine bell which was afterwards abbot Kentigern's instrument of punctuality.

In early manhood Kentigern, obeying an inward impulse, secretly departed from the home of his boyhood. The distressed abbot, who loved him as his own son, hastened in pursuit, but the fugitive had already crossed the Forth at its confluence with the Teith. Pathetic words were exchanged by the pair from opposite sides of the stream. Finally Serf gave way and blessed, with uplifted hands, the disciple he could no longer keep.

Turning westward, Kentigern found at Carnock, in the parish called St Ninian's, a venerable Christian named Fergus, who, during a tedious and painful illness, had been praying for a sight of the holy youth before his death. From the wayfarer he received his viaticum, the holy housel, and then began the journey whence none returns. On the following day Kentigern placed the body on a wagon, yoked thereto a pair of wild bulls and committed to God, in fervent supplication, their way and his own. Tamely and steadily, like the kine which drew to Bethshemesh the Ark of the Covenant, they drew their load straight to a grey ravine called Cathures and halted near a cemetery which, more than a century earlier, had been consecrated by Ninian. Thus clearly was Kentigern called



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to water where that apostle had planted. The grave in which he buried the body of Fergus was the first grave dug there. In the crypt added by archbishop Blackadder to the cathedral of Glasgow is a rude sculpture of the cart and its burden on the very site of the grave. Within the walls of the cathedral is also the well which Kentigern found lower down the slope and used for the baptism of his first converts. Half-way between the grave and the well was the stone bed on which he lay and the tall stone cross he set up as a sign of his mission.

The Kymry of Strathclyde, among whom Kentigern's lot had thus been cast, were then divided into two parties, a Christian minority who kept burning the lamp of faith lighted by Ninian, and a heathen or apostate majority. From the fact that the Christians were called by their opponents Romans we may perhaps infer that the conservative bards disparaged the alien religion by identifying it with the alien yoke. The heathenism of the invading Angles must also have overshadowed even the tribes they did not subdue. The Christian king of Strathclyde and his clergy were so deeply impressed by the young stranger's noble character, that, in spite of his modest reluctance, they insisted on enthroning him as their bishop and summoned from Ireland a Scotie bishop to consecrate him. In a clearing of the wild forest where he dwelt, close to the Molen-dinar Burn, were built his church and the huts of his Glesghu, which means Dear Family. There he carefully trained a growing body of fit clergy. How wisely the site was chosen is proved by the fact that the great city which now covers it ranks, for size and importance, second in the British Empire. His diocese stretched from sea to sea; its northern boundary was the Rampart of Antonine, its southern the Cumberland Derwent; but Galloway did not form part thereof. His age when he became bishop was only twenty-five. If, therefore, as is probable, he was born in 518, his episcopate began in 543, four years

before Ida, father of Theodoric the Flamebearer, became king of the Bernician Angles.

His habits were henceforth even more austere than hitherto. According to his legend, which cannot, of course, be literally true, he crucified his body by breaking his fast only once in three or four days. His meal consisted of bread and milk, butter or cheese, together with some simple relish. Next his skin he wore the roughest haircloth; over it a goatskin, then a cochall or hooded cloak, girded tight like a fisherman's and covered with alb and stole. His pastoral staff was of plain wood, neither gilt nor jewelled. He always carried his manual of prayer, in readiness to minister as need might require or wisdom suggest. The stone couch on which he shook off drowsiness, rather by tasting than enjoying sleep, was hollowed like a coffin. When he had, as it were, thus buried himself with Christ for a few hours of the night, he used to rise and pour forth his soul in adoration beneath the stars. At second cockcrow he stripped, plunged into the cool stream, and there, with eyes and hands uplifted, chanted the Psalter from beginning to end. He dried himself on Penryn Wleth, which means Hill of Dew and is now known as Dow Hill.

Kentigern's words were few but pithy, and carefully chosen with due regard to the special need of the hearer. His silence, however, was more eloquent than the opened sluices of many an overflowing preacher. His look, his dress, his gait, his whole bearing were object-lessons in discipline. Every glance and gesture clearly revealed his inward purity. All the wealth bestowed on him by the bounty of God was the common treasury of the poor. We can well believe that such a man 'washed a lukewarm people from the corruption of apostasy.'

In celebrating the holy eucharist his rapture seemed rather divine than human. At the words 'Sursum corda' he formed a cross with uplifted hands. From his pure heart, as from a golden censer filled with glowing coals, rose the

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fragrant incense of prayer. Some of those to whom he thus ministered were so uplifted in spirit by his fervour that, to their mind's eye, he seemed at such times to be overshadowed, now by a fluttering snow-white dove, now by a luminous cloud. During Lent, from Ash Wednesday to the eve of Palm Sunday, he retired to a cave for lonely communion with the God in whom his whole soul delighted, and ate nothing but such roots as he found within reach. Holy Week he spent with his disciples. On Maundy Thursday, after the mixing of the holy chrism, he washed the feet of several poor men and then waited on them at their meal. He closed the day by feasting the reconciled penitents and cheering them with kindly talk. Afterwards he fasted till the conclusion of the Easter Mass.

Of his diocesan work among the apostates and other heathens we are told that he made merciless war on the shrines of demons, overthrew their images, fixed the boundaries of parishes and enforced, instead of the prevalent laxer unions, holy and firm Christian wedlock. The numerous tonsured disciples who took his life for the pattern of their own were called Ceile De or Culdees, which means Servants of God.

In course of time the persistently heathen party began to vex and harass their bishop. Their leader was the wicked Morcant, who afterwards contrived the assassination of Urien, the bravest and best among Brython chieftains. Having become aware of a plot against his life, Kentigern determined to visit, at Menevia in South Wales, bishop Dewi or David, after whom the place is now called St David's. His ancestor was a Strathclyde chieftain named Cunedda, who had migrated southward with his tribe soon after the Roman garrison abandoned the more southerly wall. Like his persecuted guest he was a great restorer of decaying faith.

From Glasgow Kentigern travelled by the high road to Carlisle and Chester, but turned aside on his way to con-

vert, if possible, the heathen dalesmen of Cumberland. Crosthwaite owes its name to the cross he planted, according to his custom, in a clearing of the forest where he preached. At seven other places in Cumberland dedications preserve his memory, namely, Aspatria, Bromfield, Caldbeck, Castle Sowerby, Grinsdale, Irthington and Mungrisdale.

All the tribes of the Kymry then acknowledged the supremacy of Maelgwyn, the Christian king of Gwynedd or North Wales, in whom, as in many another of his race; religious fervour was deplorably alloyed with licentious tyranny and sensuality. From him, after they had often met, Kentigern obtained leave to found a monastery on the most convenient site in Gwynedd. Accordingly, followed by his disciples, he explored the whole district, examining the variation of climate, fertility of soil and quality of meadows, pastures and woods. They had climbed many a steep hill and penetrated many a tangled thicket when they saw, advancing to meet them out of a coppice, a wild boar, specklessly white, and were soon made to understand, by mute but clear signs, that their dumb angel wished them to follow him. They therefore tracked his footprints till he halted. In his pawing of the ground, his aiming at it with his tusks, the solemn shaking of his head and loud but friendly grunting, they could not fail to recognize the clue they were seeking. After returning thanks on bended knee, the bishop solemnly blessed the place, set up a cross and ordered the pitching of tents. The boar grunted as though displeased until he also had received a blessing, and then trotted off. The site was near the confluence of two rivers, the Elwy and the Clwyd. Kentigern, therefore, named his fortified settlement Llanelwy, and found himself at home in another Strathclyde.

All were soon busy, some clearing and levelling the ground, others laying foundations, others felling timber for building. Thither soon flocked men of every class, young

and old, rich and poor, preferring to their former lawless way of life the true freedom of willing obedience to reasonable rules. The full complement of the regiment of soldiers thus enlisted in spiritual warfare was 965. Of the three battalions into which it was divided the first, 300 strong, devoted themselves to farming, herding cattle and other kinds of labour afield; the second, also 300 strong, had charge of kitchen, workshops and all other indoor manual toil. Of these 600 none could read or write. The scholars of the community formed the third battalion, whose full strength was equal to the number of days in the year. Their field of battle was the sanctuary of God, their artillery and musketry a ceaseless round of prayer and praise. This battalion was divided into squadrons and companies, each of which took its turn of service, by day or night, during allotted hours. When the bishop's presence was required far away from the Llan he took as his escort some of those who had made most progress in holiness and wisdom or had proved themselves able teachers.

Among those few the most eminent was Asaph, whose father, Sawyl Benuchel, is described in the legend of Cadoc as a violent and cruel robber chieftain. One day, in the depth of winter, Kentigern, though fully dressed, felt so chilly after his usual prolonged plunge in the river that he bade Asaph make him a fire. The eager lad accordingly ran to the bakehouse for live coals. As there was no brasier at hand the baker, either in jest or earnest, bade him carry them in a fold of his cloak. Strong in faith, so the legend runs, he promptly did so and found his cloak unscorched when he emptied it in Kentigern's presence a few minutes later. Then followed, between master and pupil, an affectionate strife of thought and word, each attributing the miracle to the other's spotless purity of heart.

The heathen supremacy which drove Kentigern from his diocese continued until the year 573, when the Christian party won a decisive battle at Ardderyd, now Airdrie, on

the Kymric side of the bare uplands which separate Lanarkshire from the Lothian domain of the Angles. One of their leaders, Rhydderch, surnamed Hael (the Liberal), was then enthroned at Alclyde, the modern Dumbarton. He had been baptized in Erin, his mother's native land. To him Roderick Heights in Cumberland owe their name. His enlarged kingdom included the modern Cumberland, as far as the river Dee. In answer to his enquiry, Columkille afterwards assured him that, unlike nearly all tribal chieftains, he would die, not on the field of battle, but peaceably in his bed. This forecast came true in the year 603.

Rhydderch could find no better way of restoring Christianity in his kingdom than the recall of Kentigern, and therefore sent him a message of most urgent entreaty, assuring the bishop that the plotters against his life had all perished, and promising him such obedience as a son yields to a father. That exile received in silence the unwelcome summons to abandon what he had begun to regard as his lifework, but, after a night spent in prayer, felt clearly called to obey. When the day dawned he thus broke the painful news to his assembled family:

‘As a man speaking to men I may confess that my heart’s desire hath long been for these eyes, when worn out by age, to be closed by your hands, and these bones to be laid in your presence on the lap of mother earth. But no man’s life is at his own disposal, and I am bidden by the Lord to return to my church at Glasgow. Ye, therefore, my dearest friends, must quit you like men and be strong.’

Asaph was then, with the hearty approval of all, chosen to succeed his master and duly consecrated bishop. In memory of him Llanelwy is now called St Asaph’s.

Having solemnly blessed them all, Kentigern passed out of church by the north door, because, as he said, he was going to fight against the northern foe. That door was closed behind him and never afterwards opened but once a

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year, on the festival of St Asaph, May 1. This custom bore witness, on the one hand, to their respect for the holiness of their departed chief and to the sorrow caused by his departure; and, on the other, to the fact that the succession of Asaph had turned their sorrow into joy. According to the legend, more than two-thirds of the Llanelwy brotherhood felt constrained to follow their beloved father to Strathclyde.

Having been cordially welcomed by Rhydderch and the Christian Picts, Kentigern preached them an eloquent sermon at Hoddam in Annandale. He contrasted the futile worship of dumb and perishable idols with effectual service of God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ, assuring them that Woden, whom, in common with the Angles, they regarded as their chief deity, had been merely an ancient king of his race and could not, being heathen, have survived the dissolution of his body. The fruitfulness of the bishop's ministry was so soon followed by renewed fertility of the land that his repentant flock felt doubly thankful for the twofold blessing.

King Rhydderch then yielded to his bishop the same kind of submission as had been yielded, two and a half centuries earlier, to Pope Silvester by the Emperor Constantine the Great. In presence of his assembled counsellors and with their consent, he fell on his knees and placed his hands between Kentigern's; thus symbolically professing his determination to be guided in all his public acts by the revealed will of God, and justifying Serf's prescient choice of a name for the foundling. That subordination of civil to spiritual authority had lately been accomplished further north, in the coronation by Columkille of king Aedan, joint leader with Rhydderch of the Christian forces in the battle of Ardderyd and lineal ancestor of George V. Round that critical event clustered many myths. One of them tells how Kentigern met in a desert place a wild man named Merlin, the counsellor of the heathen leaders, who, holding himself guilty of the

appalling waste of human life, had lost his reason in consequence of their disastrous failure. Hoddam was the bishop's first see after his restoration, but after some time, probably about the year 582, he returned to his own home at Glasgow. In the interval he sent some of his most zealous disciples as missionaries to the Orkneys, Norway and Iceland.

One of the miracles attributed to Kentigern, his discovery of the queen's lost ring, has a permanent memorial in the three salmon, each with a ring in its mouth, which adorn the shield of the City of Glasgow. Her name was Languoreth. She had been so recklessly unfaithful as to bestow on her lover, a young and handsome soldier of the king's bodyguard, a jewelled gold ring which had been given her as a special token of her husband's affection. When Rhydderch had heard that the ring was being openly worn by the soldier and had verified the report with his own eyes, he determined to meet treachery with cunning. In his next hunting party he kept the soldier by his side and gave such orders to the rest of his followers that, late in the day, they two were alone together on a bank of the Clyde. The weary soldier lay down and slept with arm outstretched; the king drew the ring off his finger and threw it ~~into~~ the river. Three days later, in consequence of her failure to find the ring, the queen was punished by imprisonment in a dungeon and, in her distress, sent a trusty messenger to beg aid of the bishop. Kentigern promptly despatched him, with rod and line, to the river and bade him bring back the first fish he hooked. The man obeyed, caught a salmon, cut it open in the bishop's presence, found the ring in its entrails and, again obeying orders, returned it to the delighted queen, who was thus enabled to satisfy the king of her innocence. But to Kentigern she made full confession of her guilt and showed the genuineness of her contrition by lifelong renunciation of her frivolous and sinful habits.



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In the last quarter of the sixth century the social and political life of North Britain was being moulded for good by two pre-eminent seer statesmen, the abbot of Iona and the bishop of Glasgow. A full record of their conference in the valley of the Molendinar would, therefore, have been a historical document of surpassing value. All we know for certain is that they exchanged pastoral staves and that the staff which Columkille gave to Kentigern was long preserved, with much reverence, in the church built at Ripon by Wilfrith in honour of St Peter.

According to another tradition Columkille and Kentigern spent six months together in a monastery near Dunkeld, delivering to their neighbours the maxims of Christian piety.

For thirty years Kentigern fought the good fight against the powers of evil which filled those northern wilds with cruelty and lust. His severity to his body so shattered his nerves that, in his last years, he kept his lower jaw from hanging loose only by binding a linen bandage beneath his chin and above his crown. On the octave of the Epiphany, Sunday, January 13, 603, he was, at his own request, placed by his disciples in a hot bath. After a while his head sank forward, and the outworn body no longer imprisoned the soaring spirit. On that festival, in every year of his episcopate, he had been wont to baptize a large number of converts. Only a few months did his friend, king Rhydderch, survive him.

According to his legend Kentigern made missionary excursions beyond his diocese, southward into Galloway and northward into Alba. In the former district, however, no churches are named after him; but in Aberdeenshire, on the left bank of the Dee, a cluster of dedications seems to bear witness to his work north of the Mounth. Besides Glengairden, dedicated to himself, there is Lumphanan, which is clearly a corruption of Llanffinan, and Midmar dedicated to Nidan. In Anglesea two adjacent parishes

bear the names Llanffinan and Llannidan. Nidan's day in the Welsh Kalendar is September 30 and his pedigree makes him a cousin of Kentigern. It seems clear that Finan was also among the disciples who followed the bishop from Llanelwy. Wherever his preaching was fruitful Kentigern planted a memorial cross, the standard of his triumph, beautifully sculptured. Art thus became the handmaid of religion.

From the *Life of Willibald*, written towards the end of the eighth century by an English nun of Heidenheim, we learn that, when the Angle and Saxon invaders became Christian, a tall cross was often set up on a nobleman's estate and dedicated, like a church, to the Lord as a place of meeting for daily prayer. This custom may well have been borrowed from the Kymry they dispossessed.

During the boyhood of Kentigern the lofty site of a ruinous temple of Apollo, not far from Naples, was becoming a glowing centre of the regenerative process which is at the root of all that is best in our own civilization. The name of that cradle of industry, piety and learning is Monte Cassino; in the veins of Benedict, truly blessed, as his name denotes, by being God's own channel of streaming bliss, ran the noblest patrician blood. He was not so much the founder of a monastic order as a sane and practical Christian Socialist. Essentially his rule is the same as was established by Columkille at Iona and by Columban at Luxeuil; but it is less rigid than the latter in matters of detail and less autocratic than either in matters of government. The remainder of this book deals chiefly with the priceless boons conferred on England by their followers, whose work has been thus truly described by John Henry Newman:

‘ Silent men were observed about the country, or discovered in the forest digging, clearing and building; and other silent men, not seen, were sitting in the cold cloister tiring their eyes and keeping their attention on the stretch,

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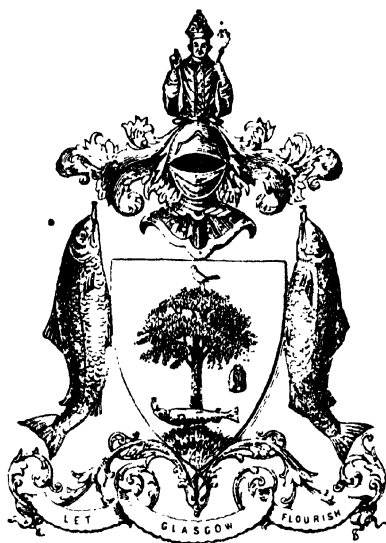
while they painfully deciphered, then copied and re-copied, the manuscripts which they had saved. There was no one that *contended or cried out*, or drew attention to what was going on; but by degrees the woody swamp became a hermitage, a religious house, a farm, an abbey, a village, a school of learning, a city'

Of Kentigern's immediate successors in the bishopric of Glasgow not even the names are recorded. The defeat and death, in the year 655, of Penda and the allied Kymric chieftains made Strathclyde tributary to Oswiu and completed the absorption of his diocese by the Northumbrian diocese of Lindisfarne. In 1107 the see was revived by king David I, then earl of Cumbria, as a suffragan see of York; 68 years later, in the first of a series of bulls, pope Alexander III declared Glasgow an independent see, under the immediate protection of St Peter and his earthly representative.

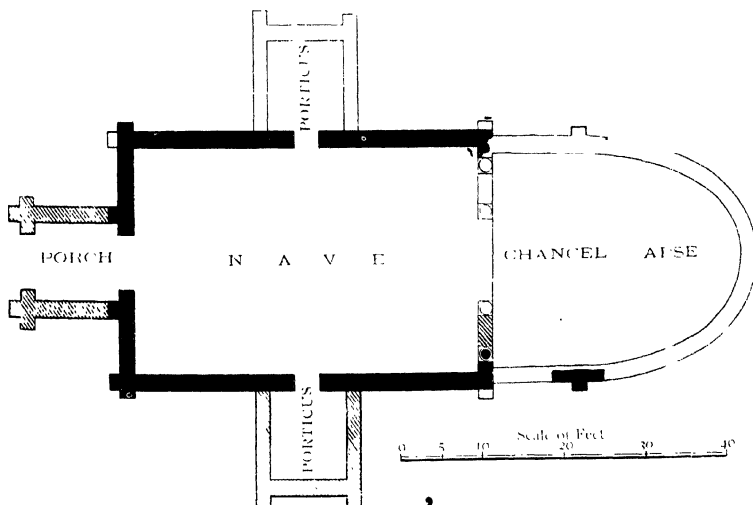
The monastic school of Culross continued to radiate its light till the year 1217 and was then refounded by English Cistercians, who cared too little about its most famous pupil to put his name in their kalendar. Reverence for him however still smouldered among the descendants of his flock and ~~was~~ rekindled by the wars of succession. Of his association, in popular worship, with foreign saints a quaint specimen is the prayer used, in the plague year 1379, by Scotch borderers on the warpath of their cruel forays:

'Gode and St Mungo, St Romain and St Andrew, schield us this day fro Goddis grace and the foule death that Englishmen dien upon.'

The allusion is to the shrewd gibe of their victims that God in his grace had sent the plague for their repentance.



ARMS OF THE CITY OF GLASGOW



PLAN OF ST. PANCRAS, CANTERBURY



CHAPTER IV  
(ATHELBERHT) ALBERT AND (AUGUSTINE)  
AUSTIN, APOSTLE OF KENT

• Il y a de ces beaux jours au début de toutes les grandes entreprises; ils ne durent point, grâce à l'infirmité lamentable et incurable des choses humaines. Mais il importe de ne les jamais oublier et de les honorer toujours. Ce sont les fleurs du printemps des belles vies. L'histoire n'a pas de mission plus salutaire que de nous en faire respirer le parfum. L'église de Cantorbéry a connu pendant mille ans des splendeurs sans pareilles; aucune Eglise dans le monde, après L'Eglise de Rome, n'a été gouvernée par de plus grands hommes, n'a livré de plus glorieux combats. Mais rien dans ses éclatantes annales ne saurait éclipser la douce et pure lumière de cet humble berceau, de ce cénacle où une poignée d'étrangers, de moines italiens, abrités par l'hospitalité généreuse d'un roi honnête homme, et guidés par l'inspiration des plus grands des Papes, s'occupaient dans la prière, l'abstinence et le travail, de conquérir les ancêtres d'un grand peuple à Dieu, à la vertu, à la vérité.

Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident*, III, 366.

**T**HE first four sentences of this eloquent passage fitly describe the fragrant century which began in England with the conversion of Albert and is imperishably enshrined in the pages of Beda. The complicated system of doctrine and ritual sent by Gregory from Rome may be compared to a beautiful exotic plant, which could bloom and bear fruit only in congenial temperaments, imaginative, reverent and aspiring. Many such were found in the highest rank of English society. After their conversion the pick of the nobility formed, both in mind and character, a true aristocracy, the men paying chivalrous homage to the women; but comparatively few of these were natives of luxurious Kent.

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On the day, November 14, 565, of Justinian's death, Albert the Ascending was probably exultant in his first panoply of spear, sword, shield and richly jewelled belt. Three generations parted him from Hengest, the father of Asc, and three more parted Hengest from Woden. So rarely was a mere boy elected king that he may have been the only surviving descendant; but it seems more probable that, in a time of profound peace, his exceptional promise of great achievement was a good enough reason for setting aside older uncles or cousins.

In the year 568, says the Chronicler, Ceawlin and Cutha fought against Albert, drove him into Kent and slew two ealdormen, Oslaf and Crebba, at Wibban Dun, the stronghold of Wibba, our Wimbledon. That was the first fight of invader against invader and was followed by the annexation of Surrey to Wessex. From the record we may perhaps infer that those two veterans saved their young king's life by the sacrifice of their own. Soon afterwards was born the founder of Islam, who died on June 8, 632. His lifetime, therefore, nearly covers the reigns of the two English kings whose momentous conversion, rather than any special holiness of life, won them their places in the Kalendar of Saints. Far northward, on Icolmkill or Iona, a kingly slave of the Cross and his twelve comrades were then beginning the strenuous and prayerful consecration of their lives which won for that small peak of primeval rock the appropriate titles, Isle of Saints, Mother of Churches.

Of the next twenty-nine years of Albert's youth and manhood we know only that they were vigorous enough to win him an overlordship which stretched as far as the Humber and the swampy valley of the Trent. He is, therefore, reckoned third among ten Bretwaldas. The first was Alli, the destroyer of Anderida; the second Ceawlin, who won predominance by his victory at Deorham; the later seven were Radwald, Edwin, Oswald, Oswiu, Ecgberht of

Mercia, Alfred the Great and Edgar. The title represents the older *Dux Britanniarum*.

Within that period may probably be placed his famous Code, consisting of ninety short dooms, most of which name the customary bot or compensation for injuries inflicted by one man on the body of another. The continental invaders of the empire had also been quick to follow the example of Justinian by codifying their laws; but, whereas the *Lex Salica* of the Franks and all other continental codes were written in Latin, Albert's was written in English. Thus early, though unconsciously, was our national independence formally claimed. The first of the dooms must have been added later, for it puts in the forefront of national order the paramount claim of the Christian church and hierarchy:

'God's fee and the Church's, twelvefold; bishop's fee, elevenfold; priest's fee, ninefold; deacon's fee, sixfold; clerk's fee, threefold.'

Thus, in reckoning compensation due for loss by theft, a priest ranks as high as the king and an exorcist, an acolyte, or the doorkeeper of a church, as high as a free-man. If Austin had compiled the code it would doubtless have been written in Latin.

When Albert became king a century of peace had restored to Kent such smiling fertility that it was in very truth the Garden of England. Its commerce with Gaul made that compact kingdom the wealthiest and most thickly populated part of Britain; but the Kentish merchants who crossed the Channel may well have inferred from the evidence of their eyes and ears that Christianity had corrupted rather than amended the morals of the Franks. Those prosperous Jutes were still content to dwell in log huts but spent lavishly on gaudy raiment and beautiful jewellery. Detached from its native soil, their ancient religion had weakened its hold on their minds; and its les-



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tivals were chiefly valued as occasions for riotous indulgence of sensual appetites. Like all other religions of the same type, it had no moral aim and was merely a means of propitiating the personified powers of nature.

The misdeeds of the Merwing Charibert, who died excommunicate in 567, were doubtless well known to Albert; the flight also of his injured queen, Ingoberg, to Tours, where she found refuge with bishop Gregory and took the veil in a convent. After her death, in the year 589, her daughter Berht became the wife of Albert, who was then presumably a widower, and brought with her to his capital a bishop named Liudhard. Her kinsfolk stipulated for the free exercise of her religion, which was, of course, readily granted by the bridegroom who had been chivalrous enough to offer her marriage. Eastward of Canterbury the bridal party found an ancient British church, repaired it for their own use and dedicated it to St Martin, the patron of Tours. There they awoke sacred echoes from a sleep that had lasted a century and a half. There too, in the spring of 597, they welcomed, as comrades in worship, the reluctant agents of Gregory the Great.

The famous meeting of Albert and Austin marks an epoch in the history not only of Britain but of Europe. The scene was Richborough, the principal port of Kent, then, at high tide, an islet. The low promontory was, and still is, crowned by the ruins of a square fort, with corner turrets and massive embattled walls. Sheltered by that imperishable monument of imperial Rome, the abbot and his companions spent in earnest prayer the days of waiting for their host; it shed on their sombre procession a lustre of equally sombre dignity as they advanced to meet him. Their number was about forty; twelve probably were, like their leader, monks of St Andrew's on the Coelian Hill, the others Roman choristers and Frankish priests, who had been collected in Gaul to act as interpreters. Austin was head and shoulders taller than his fellows. That extra

cubit of stature probably stood the mission in good stead. The rudest scoffer might well become a meek listener under the searching but gentle gaze of dark eyes that could not help looking down on him.

Mindful, we are told, of an ancient oracle, the king would not receive his visitors under a roof, lest, if they practised harmful magic, they might, as they entered, take an unfair advantage of him. He had yet to learn that the magic of Christian priestcraft aims only at men's highest welfare. As he and his train of warriors approached, the contrast between the two groups of men must have made its appeal to all. On the one side loose black robes, concealing the human form, presented from a distance an aspect of unrelieved gloom. On the other, gaily embroidered garments, blue cloaks namely and jewelled belts girding linen tunics, gaudy legbands, golden armlets, jewelled sword-hilts, flashing brilliantly in the sunshine, were eloquent symbols of the pride and joy felt by their wearers in this present life. After seating himself the king bade the peaceful invaders come within earshot. Instead of a military banner they bore in procession a large silver cross and a picture, painted on a panel, of Him who thereon won kingship over the souls of men. As they advanced they chanted litanies beseeching the Lord to bestow eternal weal, not only on themselves but on those for the sake of whom they had come thither. The weird music may well have awakened sleeping echoes in the souls of many who then heard it for the first time. At Albert's bidding Austin and his party took seats and then preached to their hosts the Word of Life. Pointing to the uplifted symbols, he told how the sinful world had been redeemed and heaven opened to all believers by One whose birth was heralded by a shining Star, whose feet trod the surging Waves, at whose death the glorious Sun was veiled, whose resurrection shook the trembling Earth.

Sensible and manly was Albert's answer to the preachers, containing, as Arthur Penrhyn Stanley remarked, the seeds

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of all that is excellent in the English character; loyalty to the tradition of the past, willingness to learn, tolerant moderation, desire to see fair play.

‘Fair are your words and promises, but so strange and puzzling that I cannot abandon in their favour the customs which, in common with the whole English race, I have so long cherished. But since, as methinks I clearly see, your aim in coming hither is to share with us what ye believe to be the best of truth, so far from wishing to annoy you, we are eager to give you a friendly welcome and to supply you with all ye need. Moreover, we hinder you not from winning to your own faith as many as ye can.’

Meanwhile, at close quarters, glances had met, heedless of garments, and the more thoughtful of the stalwart thanes may have become dimly aware that to the pale, gaunt strangers before them, fasting and silent meditation had opened a path of power and peace which would never be found by noisy revellers. As those self-reliant pioneers of orderly freedom stood facing the rough, sullen sea which had brought to that shore Caesar’s galleys and the swift keels of their own forefathers, some slight inkling may have entered their minds that a man’s worst foes are within him, and that the weapons of the new invaders, penitent prayer and sacramental grace, might be even better fitted for use than their own for display.

As though conscious that he was entertaining ambassadors of a king, Albert gave his guests quarters in the capital, as Beda calls it, of his whole empire; the Cantwara-burh namely, or fortress of the men of Kent, which stood on the site of Durovernum. Their houses were near the Staplegate, so called from the staple or market held on the north side of the town, and also near an old heathen temple which was used by members of the royal household. Nowhere else probably could they have come so quickly into close touch with all sorts and conditions of men. Not far from the site now stands the church of St Alphege.

From Richborough Austin and his party marched along a Roman road across the Downs to the summit of St Martin's Hill, and thence beheld his massive church, which they were soon to make venerable for every later age by their psalms, prayers, masses, preaching and baptisms. Lower down the slope lay before them the sparkling Stour and the straggling village which became, in consequence of their entry, the metropolitan see of England. The ground was occupied partly by ancient mounds, partly by ruinous walls of Roman brick, and chiefly by the trim and snug thatched cottages of the Jutes, set amid bright gardens.

On April 25, 597, hopeful and cheerful as the springtide glory around them, they slowly descended the hillside, behind their uplifted symbols. They were presumably escorted by spearmen and thronged by a wondering, perhaps irreverent, crowd. Among the younger children, blue-eyed and fair-haired, a few may have been so irresistibly drawn by kindred purity of heart as trustfully to place tiny hands in those of the dark strangers from afar. In the preceding spring, when Provençal tales of Saxon fierceness had filled with dread those shy disciples of Benedict, they had heard for the first time a rogationtide antiphon which was peculiar to the churches of Gaul, and combined an urgent intercession of Daniel on behalf of desolate Jerusalem with the joyous refrain of the most thankful psalms. Taking, as it were, on themselves the sins of the people they had come to save, they chanted that antiphon as they slowly drew near to the goal of their journey.

Since we have sinned  
we beseech Thee, O Lord,  
in the name of all Thy loving kindness,  
let Thy wrath and fury be turned away  
from yonder city and from Thy holy house.  
Hallelu Jah!

For the pattern of their apostolic life they took the primitive simplicity of the earliest Christians. Their prayers

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were unceasing, their watches and fasts regularly kept. To all who would listen they preached the Word of Life. Despising as none of theirs all worldly goods, they accepted from their disciples only the barest necessities and tried to live altogether in accordance with their teaching, ready to suffer hardship, even to die, for the Truth they preached. Late stories of insults meekly borne by their leader differ in detail but may well be true in substance.

Among the first group of converts was Albert himself, whose rapid abandonment of his cautious attitude may have been partly due to the influence of his wife, also, perhaps, to the endearments of their little daughter Athelburh, whose pet name, Tata, means darling. She had doubtless been already baptized by Liudhard and was the first English child that lisped the name of Jesus. From the fact that Eadbald, the only son of Albert named by Beda, was an obstinate heathen when he succeeded his father nineteen years later, it may be fairly inferred that Berht was not his mother. The traditional date of Albert's baptism in St Martin's church is the eve of Whitsunday, June 2, 597, a week before the death of Columkille. The stately ritual described in Chapter II was used as nearly as possible, and the impressive prayer that consecrated the water was, doubtless, thus interpreted beforehand to the royal neophyte:

'Let this holy and guiltless creature be free from every onslaught of the Adversary and purified by the departure of all wickedness. Be it a living spring, a source of new life, a cleansing wave; in order that all who are to be washed in this healthful bath may, by the working in them of the Holy Ghost, attain perfect remission and expiation. Thee, therefore, creature water, do I bless through the living God, the holy God, who in the beginning, when the world was created, set thee by his Word apart from dry land, whose Spirit brooded over thee, who bade thee flow from Eden and in four rivers water the whole earth; who in the desert, by sweetening thy bitterness, made thee fit to

drink and brought thee forth from a rock for the thirsty people. I bless thee also through Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who in Cana of Galilee by his own power wonderfully changed thee into wine, who trod thee with his feet and was by John baptized in thee, the river Jordan. Thee together with his own blood He brought forth from his side; in thee He bade his disciples baptize believers.

The following Whitsunday prayer was especially appropriate to that auspicious occasion:

‘O Lord, who dost continually increase thy Church by calling the Gentiles, vouchsafe ever to extend thy protection over those whom Thou art about to cleanse in the waters of baptism. . . . Do Thou, who bringest together divers nations in the praise of thy name, grant us will and power to do what Thou commandest, that this people whom Thou hast summoned to thine everlasting kingdom may be one in faith and in loving service of Thee.’

The baptism of Albert, of course, increased Austin's congregations and stimulated the process of winning adherents, among whom were probably some true converts. No constraint was put on any man to follow his king's example; but the many who willingly became Albert's fellow citizens in the wider Kingdom felt the warmth of his affection. Writing in June, 598, to his friend Eulogius, the Patriarch of Alexandria, Gregory reported, with glowing thankfulness, that, at the preceding Christmastide, about six weeks after Austin had been consecrated archbishop in the cathedral church of Arles, as many as ten thousand Kentish converts had set the seal of baptism to their conversion. The bearers to him of this good news were two members of the mission, a priest named Lawrence and a monk named Peter. The baptism is said to have taken place where the river Swale broadens out, near the mouth of the Medway. That the enthusiasm thus recorded was genuine we need not doubt; but it probably died away for lack of nourishment. None of those earliest neophytes

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learnt Latin, except the few boys who afterwards entered the monastic schools. Even those of them, therefore, who were not overfed could neither explore in the psalms the hidden recesses of their own souls, nor discover for themselves, in gospels and epistles, by prayerful meditation, the royal way of the holy cross. It was quite natural for them to regard the new ritual and incantations as nothing more than a superior kind of magic, intended to restrict the freedom of a grimly just God in his dealings with unruly men.

One of the earliest victims of the persecution organized by Galerius and Maximian in the name of Diocletian was a boy named Pancras, fourteen years old. Phrygia was his native land, but he was baptized in Rome by the Pope and butchered beside the Via Aurelia on May 12, 304. To him Austin dedicated the first of our heathen temples which became a Christian church. It stood midway between the walls of Canterbury and the church of St Martin, and had likewise been originally built by Romans. The dedication was doubly reminiscent; both of the English slave-boys whom Gregory had pitied in the Roman Forum, and of the fact that the site of Gregory's own monastery, St Andrew's on the Coelian, had formed part of the patrimony of that young martyr.

Outside the eastern wall, beside a road already lined with ancient tombs, Austin began to build, in honour of St Peter and St Paul, an abbey church which owed its later pre-eminence to the fact that it was the burial place of kings and prelates. The first abbot was that Peter. The church was dedicated by that Lawrence in the year 605, when he had become archbishop in place of Austin. Its name was afterwards changed, at least in common talk, to St Augustine's in honour of the founder. Within the precinct soon clustered a monastic brotherhood.

Within the walls of Canterbury, after it had become the see of his archbishopric, Austin found traces of an ancient

British church. Using craftsmen and Roman materials supplied by the king, he built on the site, in honour of the Saviour, the mother church of English Christianity, a stately basilica, with apses at both ends. The traditional date of its dedication is June 9, 602, the festival of St Primus and St Felicianus, two Roman martyrs who were beheaded by order of Maximian. The builder was, of course, unaware that the day is also the festival of Columkille.

The mission had then been reinforced by a fresh party from Rome. The leaders were Mellit, Just, Paulin and Rufinian. They brought with them a letter from Gregory to Albert bearing the date June 22, 601, and setting before him as follows a high standard of kingly duty:

‘In promoting a succession of good men to rule over nations, Almighty God aims at bestowing on their subjects, through their agency, gifts that flow from his own Love. We are aware that this process has begun among the English, who have for no other reason become thy Majesty’s subjects than that, through boons granted to thee, blessings from on high may be bestowed on them. Therefore, my renowned son, guard with anxious thought thy divine gift of grace, hasten to spread the Christian faith among the peoples that own thy sway, redouble thy earnest efforts to convert them, rebuke every form of idolatry, overthrow heathen temples, admonish thy subjects, frighten, coax, reprove them, let them see patterns of good work, and thus, out of clean living, build up character; in order that in heaven thou mayest find recompense at the hands of Him whose name thou hast made known far and wide on earth. For He, whose honour thou art seeking and guarding among the nations, will himself cause thy renown to shine even more brightly in later ages.

‘Thus indeed formerly did the devout Emperor Constantine recall the State of Rome from idolatrous perverseness and make both it and himself submissive to Almighty God and our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, together with the peoples that owned his imperial sway, he turned with his whole heart. The fame of ancient emperors is consequently eclipsed by the renown of that great man, who sur-

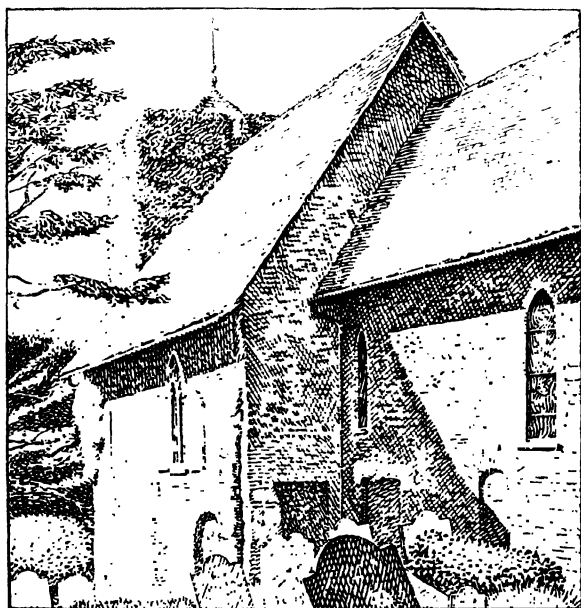
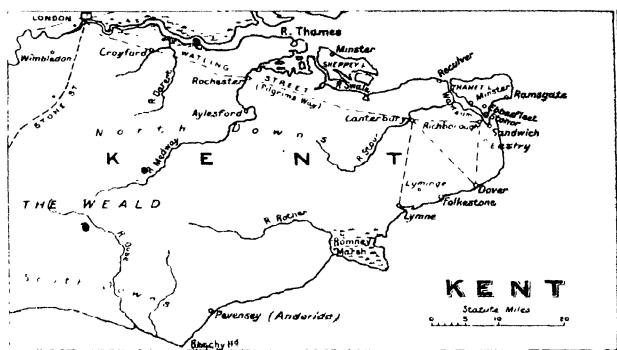


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passes them no less in reputation than in the excellence of his work. Let thy Majesty now hasten as he did to set flowing among the peoples and nations that own thy sway the knowledge of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that thou mayest outstrip the ancient kings of thy race in praiseworthy deeds. Thus, even as in so dealing with thy subjects thou dost blot out other men's sins, wilt thou, in reference to thine own, be able to await with less anxiety the even-handed justice of Almighty God.

'Gladly hear, zealously perform, carefully treasure in thy mind whatever counsel thou dost receive from our very reverend brother Austin, who is fully instructed in the rule of his order, filled with understanding of Holy Writ, fruitful, under God's guidance, of good works; because, if thou dost listen when he speaks on behalf of Almighty God, to him also, when he prayeth earnestly for thee, Almighty God lendeth a ready ear. For if thou dost take advantage of his absence by disregarding his words, how will Almighty God be able to hear on thy behalf him to whom, when he speaks on God's behalf, thou payest no heed? With all thy heart, therefore, gird up thy loins as his comrade in the full glow of faith; and with thy God-given endowment of manly vigour, lend such aid to his strenuous efforts that He, whose faith thou art causing to be welcomed and treasured in thy kingdom, may himself admit thee to a share of his own.'

Between the lines of these fatherly exhortations it seems hardly unfair to read that the first flush of enthusiasm for the new faith had been followed by distressing reaction. There can be little doubt that the loyalty to Albert, as later to Edwin, of those who stood firm in the old ways was strained almost to breaking-point by his disloyalty to the gods of his fathers. It is, therefore, easy to imagine how fiery was the trial through which this pastoral may have helped him to pass unscathed. At the very age when insistent ambition matches ripeness of manhood, the long-coveted and hardly won prize of overlordship seemed to be slipping from his grasp. Very wisely did the tactful pontiff wing his shafts with eloquent appeals to the king's en-



St Martin's Church ❧



lightened sense of his own interest. Yet, in bidding Albert abandon his wise policy of toleration, Gregory's zeal clearly outran his discretion. Three years later the letter bore what seems to have been its only fruit in the conversion of the East Saxon king Sabert, Albert's nephew and vassal. How merely nominal was the consequent conversion of Sabert's folk appeared only too clearly after his death.

Gregory's letter to Albert concluded with a warning that the end of the world was drawing nigh. No expectation could have been more natural in the circumstances. The aged and overburdened Pope had for that very reason been, perhaps, unduly eager to snatch, by premature baptism, as many as possible from the jaws of hell. Besides the letter he sent gifts as a token to the king of the favour of the great Fisher of Men. They were afterwards laid up in the cathedral treasury, namely, a golden vessel and mirror, a silver dish, an embroidered shirt, a silken military cloak, a saddle and a bridle set with gold and pearls.

Berht also received a letter, thanking her for her gracious and cordial reception of the mission, bidding her strengthen by constant admonition her husband's active faith, and assuring her that the fame of her good deeds had spread far and wide, beyond Rome, even to the imperial court at Constantinople.

While the bearers of these letters were on their way they were overtaken by an express from Gregory, who had wisely repented of the intolerant policy he had urged on Albert but seems to have let his mental pendulum swing too far in the opposite direction. In a letter to Mellit he bade him destroy only the idols but convert the temples into churches and consecrate them by sprinkling, instead of the animal blood which had first sprayed the walls, water duly blessed by solemn prayer. After reminding his agent that men climb not by leaps but by steps he proceeded to recommend that annual festivals, dear to the hearts of the people, should not be abolished but kept as dedication festivals or

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in honour of the holy martyrs whose relics were placed in the churches. The Jutes, the Saxons also and Angles, celebrated as feasts the harvest and both solstices. Temple precincts were then thronged with folk who ate and drank, shouted and danced before the altars, on which heaps of the cattle they devoured had first been sacrificed. They were still, ordered Gregory, to feast on the cattle, seated in booths of boughs round the newly consecrated churches and giving thanks to the Bestower of all boons. Thus arose the Whitsun and Church Ales and the May revels of Merry England. Hence also the paschal feast was named after the goddess Eostre, in whose month—April—it generally fell. As the Teutonic Yuletide included the winter solstice, that long festival became inextricably mixed with Christmas. The first Monday in the new year, Plough Monday, had a special ritual of its own to propitiate the earth goddess. The revelers dressed in skins of deer and bullocks and covered their own heads with heads of beasts.

Between the ambitious Jute chieftain and the ascetic Italian monk, brought together in mature age by no choice of their own, there could, of course, exist no such brotherly fellow-feeling as, thirty years after Austin's death, made the united work of Oswald and Aidan a pearl of great price. The last quoted of Gregory's admonitions may even have been directed against Albert's impatience with his archbishop's stiffness of mind, his 'want of consideration for unfamiliar points of view and different forms of experience.' Austin has been aptly compared to Malvolio, who had greatness thrust upon him against his will; but he deserves unstinted praise for having laid, in the eight laborious years of his ministry, so firm a foundation for his successors.

In the year 604 Mellit was consecrated by Austin missionary bishop of the East Saxons and Just bishop of Rochester, which was probably the capital of a western division of Kent. The mother of Sabert, king of Essex, was

a sister of Albert named Ricul. From his capital, London, bishop Theonas had fled to Wales in the year 586 and there joined his colleague, Thadioc of York. In order to make that city the see of a new bishopric, Albert built there and liberally endowed a church in honour of St Paul. According to ancient tradition the site had been occupied by a temple of Apollo. For Just, likewise, Albert built and endowed a church in honour of St Andrew. The charter is dated April 28, 604.

Besides letters Mellit and his party brought from Rome a large collection of devotional books and commentaries, chiefly a great Bible in two volumes and many psalters. They brought also sumptuous vestments; a silken cope of sapphire blue, bordered with gold and embroidered with gems; three similar purple copes, the colour being symbolic of the blood of Christ; and a purple chasuble. The altar plate they brought was equally magnificent and the relics the most precious Gregory could give. Finally, to the archbishop himself they brought the emblem of apostolic authority known as the pallium. It is in form a circular woollen band, doubled over the shoulders, with two straight bands so attached as to present the shape of a Y before and behind. In its origin it was merely a complimentary decoration conferred on distinguished prelates, first by the Emperor, then by the Pope in his name. The lambs of St Agnes' convent in Rome have long grown wool for the papal pallia, which are always laid for a night on the tomb of St Peter before they are stored away. Thus does the pallium become, as it were, the very mantle of the Chief Apostle, a kind of participation in the command, Feed my sheep. 'Three mysteries,' says Thomas Fuller, 'were couched therein. First, humility, which beautifies the clergy above all their costly coats; secondly, innocency, to imitate lamblike simplicity; and thirdly, industry, to follow Him who fetched his wandering sheep home on his shoulders.'

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On March 12, 604, worn out by care and suffering, died the noble Roman of whom Beda truly says: 'Our own apostle we may fairly call him, as in duty bound.' A nameless Englishman likewise wrote, years afterwards, 'He is our fosterfather in Christ, and we are his fosterchildren in baptism.' In the following year, on May 26, died also Austin, who had already, in prospect of his departure, consecrated Lawrence to succeed him as archbishop. Of the eleven years that elapsed before Albert joined them, on February 24, 616, only two events are recorded; the completion, already mentioned, and consecration of St Augustine's, in which the late archbishop's body was entombed; and the formation in the year 615 of a monastic brotherhood for the cathedral church of Canterbury. Written permission had been sent, at the request of Albert, by Pope Boniface IV. The bearer of the document was Mellit.

In the course of that interval the Bretwaldaship passed from Albert to Radwald of East Anglia, who had been converted and baptized in Kent. Berht also passed away and her place was taken by a heathen wife, whom, in accordance with Teutonic custom, Eadbald married immediately after his father's death. All those of his subjects who had, merely to please Albert, submitted to baptism and Christian discipline then 'returned to their former vomit.'

Sabert, the Christian king of the East Saxons, died within a year or two of Albert and was succeeded by his three heathen sons, who at once threw off the restraint in which he had held them. They picked a quarrel with Mellit in St Paul's Cathedral by demanding the eucharistic bread and expelled him from their land. He and Just then bowed before the storm by retiring to Gaul. Lawrence reluctantly prepared to follow them and, on the eve of his departure, ordered his bed to be made in the church of St Peter and St Paul. There he slept and had a vision of the Chief Apostle sternly rebuking him. In the morning he went to Eadbald, stripped his back and showed the marks of a

severe scourging. In answer to the king's astonished question he assured him that the blows had been inflicted by Peter himself. The faithless king had already been chastised by attacks of insanity and then became so alarmed that he renounced his unlawful marriage, cursed all idolatry, professed himself a Christian and was duly baptized. Afterwards he was always, to the best of his ability, a staunch supporter of the Church. His second wife Emma was an orphan daughter of Theudebert the Frank, king of Austrasia.

Recalled by Lawrence, Just returned to Rochester after a year's absence. Mellit also returned, but was not readmitted to London, where, even though the three insolent young princes had been slain in battle by the West Saxons, idolatrous worship continued in full swing.

St Augustine's was doubtless a school of science and literature, the trivium and quadrivium, as well as of doctrinal and pastoral theology; but remarkably few of the Kentish boys who were trained there attained episcopal rank in the seventh century and none became a missionary beyond the borders of Kent. Peter died in the year 607; the second abbot, John, in 618; the third, Rufinian, in 626. The sixth abbot, Nathanael, who ruled from 654 to 667, was the last survivor of Gregory's second mission. Albin, the first English abbot, was blessed for the office on April 22, 708, by Brihtwald, the second English archbishop of Canterbury.

Midway between the deaths of Austin and Albert, at Chagny near Meaux, the Elijah of Merovingian Gaul was being soothed and comforted in the bosom of a Christian family. The host, Chagneric, was a son of the Burgundian noble who had, after her betrothal, escorted Clothildis, the grandmother of Berht, to the court of Clovis. His guest, Columban, a Leinster Scot, eighty years old, had for twenty years been maintaining, on a southern spur of the Vosges, an austere but attractive standard of Christian



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manliness. Driven thence by an evil king, the uncle of Emma, and evil prelates, he was being providentially guided towards Bobbio, where he entered, on November 28, 615, into his well-earned rest. One of the faithful few who had followed their beloved abbot from Luxeuil, down the Loire and up the valley of the Seine, was a son of Chagneric named Chagnoald, who afterwards became bishop of Laon. The hostess, Leodegund, was a woman of such genuine piety and refinement that she may well have seemed to her guest the living image of his own fond mother. Her gentle sympathy doubtless helped him to recover from the strain of his trying journey. Her youngest daughter, a fair damsel twelve years old, filled to the brim his cup of bliss by the angelic docility with which she listened to his talk. Discerning the promise of her high vocation, he blessed that child more earnestly than the rest of the family. Of her full name Burgundofara the first three syllables were seldom spoken. She became, as will appear in Chapter XIX, the spiritual mother of many an English maiden. Her brother Chagnoald ruled her monks under her orders.

Such a maiden had for her father either a king or a royal atheling, or an eorl, who traced his ancestry to some independent leader of invasion; less often a gesith, one of the king's chosen band of comrades and councillors, called in this book companion thanes, who formed his bodyguard in warfare and were endowed by him with land; hardly ever, perhaps, a thane of lower rank, ennobled by service in the king's household.

## CHAPTER V

### EDWIN AND PAULIN

God is judge:  
He putteth down one and lifteth up another.

Ps. lxxv, 7.

**I**N the year 547 the district of Birneich or Bernicia, extending from the Tyne to the Firth of Forth, had been so completely subjugated by the Angles that their leader Ida took the title of king. The beetling rock fortress which he made his headquarters took its name Bebban-burh, the modern Bamborough, from his wife Bebba, who doubtless kept anxious watch there during his absence. After his death in the year 559 six of his sons reigned in turn. The third of them, Hussa, was driven to bay by a powerful combination of four Brython chieftains, including Rhydderch Hael and headed by Urbgen, the City-born, or Urien. As his name is Latin he probably called himself, with some pride, a citizen of Rome. He was lord of Rheged, the modern Redesdale. By him were sometimes routed the forces of Theodoric, Ida's fifth son, who reigned from 580 to 587. In the Welsh records he is called Flamddwyn, the Flamebearer, a word which sums up untold misery of wives and children rendered homeless by the ruthless invaders. After his death a disastrous battle brought irreparable woe to the Brythons and is commemorated in a famous Welsh poem, which bears the name Gododin of a district in the neighbourhood of Rheged. The cause of their defeat is clearly hinted in the following stanza:

The warriors went to Cattraeth: famous were they.  
Wine and mead, from gold, had been their liquors.  
Three heroes and threescore and three hundred,  
With the golden torcs.

Of those who hastened after the jovial excess,  
There escaped only three from the power of the swords,  
And I, Aneurin, from the flowing blood,  
The reward of my blessed Muse.

Consequently Athelric, Ida's sixth son, felt so safe from Brythons that he had been hardly a year on his throne when he turned his arms against the Angles of Deur or Deira, the modern Yorkshire. By thus taking advantage of the death of king Alla and of the infancy of his son, Eadwine or Edwin, he united Bernicia and Deira into the one kingdom of Northumbria. Among his prisoners of war were probably the three boys whose fair faces and clustering curls caught the eye of Gregory when they were being sold in the slave market of Rome.

In the year 594 Athelric was succeeded by his son Athelfrith the Destroyer, who made it the chief object of his life to exterminate such of the Brythons as lay within his reach. He won two decisive battles; at Degsastan, probably the same as Dawston, in the year 603, over Picts and Scots, whose leader Aedan, the friend of Columkille, was among the slain; the other, ten years later, at Chester, over the Kymry. This victory isolated Wales and was, therefore, bitterly resented by the Kymry. They could moreover neither forget nor forgive the cruel massacre, on the battle-field, of 1,200 monks, more than half of the whole Bangor brotherhood, whose only weapons were their prayers and whose hands merely laboured for their own living.

The year of Edwin's birth was 585. According to Welsh tradition his boyhood was spent in Gwynedd, as North Wales was then called, at the court of a chieftain named Cadvan. Afterwards he found refuge in Mercia and there married Cwenburh, the daughter of king Ceorl. Their two sons, Osfrith and Eadfrith, were born during his exile. In the year 616 he made his way to East Anglia and was welcomed by king Radwald, probably at Rendelsham in Suffolk. That Bretwalda had been baptized in Kent but

had weakly compromised with his heathen wife and witan by allowing heathen sacrifices to be offered, as of yore, to the idols which still stood in the temple he had chosen for Christian worship. From his grandfather Uffa his dynasty took the name Uffing. Even in Albert's lifetime he won for his vigorous folk the lead which placed him fourth in the line of Bretwaldas.

No sooner did Athelfrith hear of his rival's presence at Radwald's court than he sent envoys, time after time, to extort Edwin's murder from that king by larger and larger bribes. Radwald finally gave way to a threat of invasion and reluctantly promised either to slay or surrender his guest. It was already evening when his assembled witan heard him pronounce that shameful decision in his council hall. Among the thanes then present was one of Edwin's most faithful friends, who hastened to warn him of the intended treachery entering his bedroom and calling him forth out of doors, lest their talk might be overheard. 'If thou wilt,' quoth he, 'at this very moment I will guide thee out of this province and place thee beyond the reach both of Radwald and Athelfrith.'

'I thank thee,' nobly but wearily answered the hunted exile, 'for thy kind offer; but I cannot be the first to break faith with so great a king, while he has neither done me wrong nor shown me ill-will. If speedy death be indeed my doom, let him, rather than a meaner man, slay me. Whither indeed can I now flee, who have long wandered year after year through every province in Britain dodging the traps set for me by my foes.'

Left alone by his friend on a stone bench under a stormy sky, the hapless prince became the prey of conflicting emotions and burning thoughts. About midnight he suddenly espied a man, strange in look and dress, drawing nigh to him in the stillness. So unstrung was his mood that the ghostlike apparition filled his strong soul with terror. The weird visitor came close, greeted him, and asked why, at

an hour when others slept sound, he alone sat on that cold bench, gloomily wakeful. 'What matters it to thee,' was the sullen answer, 'whether I pass the night indoors or not?'

'Deem me not,' gently replied the stranger, 'unaware of the cause of thy sleepless grief and lonely vigil. Most surely wot I who thou art, why thou feelest sad and what thou darest in the near future. Tell me, what meed wilt thou give the man, whosoever he be, that setteth thee free from these fits of gloom by persuading Radwald neither himself to harm thee nor let thee be slain by thy foes?'

'For such a boon,' answered Edwin, cheering up, 'no meed in my power would be too great.'

'What if he were also faithfully to promise that, after thy foes have passed away, thou wilt be so great a king as to surpass in power not only thy ancestors but all who have hitherto reigned over the English race?'

Steadied by this volley of hopeful questions, Edwin promised without hesitation that his gratitude would be as unstinted as the goodwill of the gifted seer. From the questioner's quiver was then drawn his third and last shaft:

'If moreover, he that has truly foretold thee such great blessings can show thee a better and safer way of life than has been heard or dreamed of by any of thy kith and kin, dost thou agree to submit to him and act on the counsel he gives thee for thy own good?'

Very promptly did Edwin promise literal obedience to the deliverer who could not only snatch him from the brink of a yawning abyss but set him on so lofty an eminence. With equal promptness did the stranger then lay his own right hand on Edwin's head, saying as he did so these parting words:

'When the time comes for this token to remind thee of our present talk, delay not fulfilment of thy promise.'

He straightway vanished, no less stealthily than he had appeared. Soon afterwards the friendly thane found Edwin still sitting on the stone bench, rejoicing indeed at the

break in his clouds, but still anxious and half afraid to trust the unknown stranger.

‘Rise,’ said the friend, greeting him with a glad smile, ‘enter, cast away thy cares, relax in sleep both limbs and mind, for the king’s heart is changed. No harm will he do thee but rather keep troth. After he had revealed to the queen in secret his intended treachery, she recalled him to his better self, protesting that it nowise behoved so great a king to sell for gold the best of his race, nay more to forfeit, through greed of coin, his own honour, the most priceless of his ornaments.’ She doubtless felt true womanly compassion for their handsome young guest.

So effectually indeed had Radwald been roused from his lethargy that he resolved to help Edwin recover his kingdom. Having dismissed the envoys, he speedily mustered all his forces and marched northward. Taken by surprise, Athelfrith met him and Edwin with inferior numbers near Retford in the fenland of the lower Trent, and was there routed and slain. The river Idle gave its name to the battle, which was fought in the year 617. Among the slain was also a son of Radwald named Ragenheri. Long afterwards lays of gleemen still told how

With blood of Angles  
Idle ran foul.

Deira then cast off the galling Bernician yoke and welcomed its own rightful king. Thus quickly began the fulfilment of the stranger’s prophecy.

Long-cherished resentment burst forth in the first acts of the young victor. His own sister Acha, then probably dead, was the mother of the two eldest among Athelfrith’s seven sons, namely, Eanfrith and Oswald. They were all ruthlessly driven out of Bernicia by the uncle of those two, who added their heritage to his own. Followed, doubtless, by their father’s surviving ealdormen, they crossed the Forth, found refuge among the Picts and were afterwards wel-

came at Iona by the Brython abbot, Fergna. In the monastery school they learnt the Christian faith, were in due time baptized and then probably returned to the mainland. Thus was Edwin unwittingly, in the worst deed recorded of him, a fellow worker with God for the welfare of the Angle folk after his death. Against the Picts and those exiles he protected himself by crowning with Eadwines Burh, the modern Edinburgh, the lofty hill which overlooks the Firth of Forth where the junction of the coastal defile with the Tweed valley forms the gateway between England and Scotland. The essential features of such a fortification were a central mound and a peripheral trench. It may be noted in passing that Talorgan, who became in 653 king of the Picts, was the son born to Eanfrith by a Pictish princess.

Another of Edwin's nephews, Hereric, the son of his eldest brother, had been poisoned, doubtless by Athelfrith's orders, while he dwelt among the Welsh of Elmet, the forest-clad district which lay westward of Loidis or Leeds. In revenge for this crime Edwin expelled their king Cerdic and annexed their land to Deira. He thus added to his dominions a stretch of territory which included lower Airedale and Calderdale and probably extended from the forest of Knaresborough to the summits of the Peak. Its desolation in those days stands in strong contrast to the teeming life of our West Riding. A few miles northward of both Ripon and Leeds, at Tanfield and Barwick-in-Elmet, may still be seen two of the burhs by means of which the young conqueror held his new domain. As the land between the Ribble and the Dee had already been annexed to Northumbria by Athelfrith, Edwin's rule was unbroken from sea to sea. With a fleet equipped in the harbour of Chester he next subdued the two large islands of the Irish Sea and changed the name of the nearer from Mona to Anglesea. The death of Radwald, soon after his victory over Athelfrith, was followed by such a shrinkage of his son

Eorpwald's domain that Edwin's rule spread across the Trent as far as Lincoln. So good was the peace he maintained everywhere that, as the proverb ran, a mother might tramp afoot unscathed from sea to sea with her new-born babe at her breast.

Even in the twelfth century no higher praise could be given to a Norman king than: He made good peace. Edwin's control over his wilder and more unruly subjects proves him to have been at least as masterful as Henry II; that he cared far more for their welfare appears from his tenderness to thirsty travellers. At every clear spring near a high road were set by his orders posts from which hung brazen cups. Those who loved him would not, and those who feared him dared not, misuse those eloquent tokens of their king's affection. Such a ruler was clearly not far from the kingdom of God.

When his first wife died we know not, but before his reign had lasted eight years he was free to strengthen his position by a second marriage and sued to Eadbald, king of Kent, for the hand of his half-sister Athelburh. The completeness of Eadbald's conversion had already, in the year 624, been warmly commended by Pope Boniface V in a letter which bestowed on Just, bishop of Rochester, the pallium of the metropolitan see. The king who had shocked his Christian subjects by marrying his stepmother was accordingly unwilling to let Tata follow her own mother's example. 'A holy Christian maiden,' was his answer to Edwin, 'cannot lawfully run the risk of becoming tainted by marriage with a heathen.' The fifth Bretwalda then meekly offered to do nothing contrary to the new faith, to allow Athelburh and her attendants full freedom of worship and to submit himself with an open mind to Christian teaching. 'If,' quoth he, 'thy religion is found by my witan to be holier and worthier of God than ours, it will become the rule of my life.'

To Just, sick at heart through hope deferred, this gentle



answer must have seemed the opening into Deira of such a door as Gregory had longed for. Guided, doubtless, by his advice, Eadbald gave way. On July 21, 625, Paulin was consecrated bishop in order that, like Liudhard, he might first escort the bride to her new home and then keep her and her people pure from all heathen taint by daily ministration of the life-giving Word and sacramental food. His whole heart, says Bede, was set on joining in spiritual wedlock with Christ the Angles of Northumbria; but he found them blinded by their own worldliness to the gospel dawn.

Soon after their marriage Edwin and his bride were exhorted by that Pope somewhat as follows:

‘ Because the might of supreme Godhead has an eternal existence so invisible and unsearchable that no human wit is shrewd enough to grasp it, human language is also powerless to express it. Nevertheless, His sympathy with mankind aims at unlocking men’s hearts in order to enter them and, with this end in view, lovingly pours into their minds by secret inspiration a revelation of His own nature. Our pastoral zeal has, therefore, been increasing to declare to thee the full Christian faith, in order that, by grafting on thy faculties the very Gospel of Christ which our Saviour commanded to be preached to all nations, we may furnish thee with the means of securing the welfare of thy soul.

‘ The Sovereign Power on high first founded and created by a mere word of command sky, earth, sea and all they contain; then set them their permanent bounds; and, finally, working in harmonious order with the counsel of the co-eternal Son and the unity of the Holy Spirit, formed and moulded out of clay man in His own image and likeness. On man thus formed He hath bountifully bestowed the precious privilege of pre-eminence over the whole Creation and the sure prospect of eternal life as the reward of obedience. This God, therefore, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, an indivisible Trinity, is reverently worshipped as their Maker by all mankind from East to West. In confessing their faith they win health for their souls. To Him also are subject the highest thrones and all worldly authority,

because in every kingdom promotion depends on His choice and grant.

‘We have, therefore, earnestly and lovingly exhorted thee and thy queen to loathe idols and their worship, to scorn the grotesque follies of temples and the alluring tricks of soothsayers, to believe in God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, in order that by believing ye may, through the active mighty working of the holy undivided Trinity, be set free from the bonds of captivity to devils and become capable of eternal life.

‘It is your joint duty to take up the standard of the Holy Cross, by which mankind has been redeemed; to cast away from your minds the accursed hypocritical deceit of devilish cunning which sets itself up in envious rivalry to the works of divine goodness; to lay violent and destructive hands on the wooden deities ye have hitherto fashioned for yourselves. Their very fragility and rottenness, which never had the breath of life and could nowise receive from their makers any gift of perception, shows you clearly what things of naught ye formerly worshipped.

‘From a higher source your being is derived. From the living Lord ye received the breath of life. Draw near, therefore, till ye recompense your Creator who sent His only begotten Son to redeem you, to rescue you from original sin, and having set you free from the power of devilish wickedness, to endow you with heavenly treasures. Listen, then, to the words of the preachers and their gospel messages, in order that, having been born again by water and the Holy Spirit, ye may be able to share the everlasting glorious life of Him in whom ye have put your trust.’

In a separate letter to Athelburh the same Pope argued that her wedlock would not be holy while Edwin refused allegiance to Christ, and bade her reinforce her prayers for his conversion by pleading with him in season and out of season. With these fatherly letters were sent tangible tokens of the apostle Peter’s good will; to Edwin a shirt of fine linen embroidered with gold and a costly cloak; to Athelburh a silver mirror and an ivory comb inlaid with gold.

Easter Eve, April 19, 626, was doubly eventful for the royal pair. In their vill near the Yorkshire Derwent, on a site still visible at Aldby, the king narrowly escaped assassination and the queen gave birth to a daughter.

Cynegils, king of Wessex, had admitted his son Cwichelm to a share of his own authority. Together they waged successful warfare against the Welsh and the Mercians but were not strong enough to resist the encroachment of Edwin. Filled with bitter resentment, Cwichelm determined to rid himself of the Bretwalda, and sent an envoy named Eomer with secret orders to use in his service a double-edged poisoned dagger. The threatened life was saved by the devotion of a comrade thane named Lilla. Having no shield at hand, he interposed his own body when Eomer rose suddenly, unsheathed his dagger beneath his cloak and rushed at the king. So violent was the blow that the dagger passed through Lilla's body, killing him on the spot, and wounded Edwin. Not before the fell steel had found a second victim in one of them, named Fordher, did the swords of the attendant thanes slay the swashbuckler, as Thomas Fuller calls him, who, by despising his own life, became master of another man's.

The baby princess was named Eanfled. Due thanksgiving was rendered for her birth, to Woden and Frea by her father, to the Lord Jesus by Paulin, whose prayers, he assured the king, had won for the queen her safe and easy delivery. Pleased by his words and awestruck by his own narrow escape, which Paulin also attributed to the prevailing power of his prayers, Edwin made a conditional promise to renounce his idols and to take Christ for his Master. As a pledge of good faith he at once gave up his daughter. With eleven members of the royal household she was baptized by Paulin on June 7, the eve of Whitsunday. They were the Christian first-fruits of Northumbria. At the age of eighteen Eanfled became the wife of Oswiu, the seventh Bretwalda.





The condition attached by Edwin to his promise was that he might first, through the power of Christ, defeat in battle the plotters against his life. As soon as his wound was healed, he gathered an army, invaded Wessex and either slew or captured all the conspirators. From the fact that five sub-kings were among the slain it appears that his vengeance was indiscriminate. Nevertheless he was in no hurry to change his religion. Though he loyally kept his promise to renounce the worship of idols the very honesty of his nature made him delay the final step till he felt fully assured. During the long and lonely inward struggle he frequently let Paulin expound to him the principles of Christianity and discussed their practical bearing with the wisest of his ealdormen and thanes. More often, trusting to his own shrewdness, he spent many hours in silent meditation, probing the deepest recesses of his mind in quest of truth. Fervent must have been the prayers of Athelburh and her companions that the eyes of his soul might be opened to the Light. The Pope's admonitory letters were delivered in the course of this critical period.

At last Paulin threw off his mask. One day, while the king sat brooding as usual in moody silence, he felt a hand laid on his head and heard the bishop's voice asking whether he recognized the token. Ten years had passed since that memorable night, but so well was the moment chosen that the last barrier in the young king's heart suddenly gave way. Trembling in every limb, he would have fallen at the bishop's feet but was gently raised and quietly reminded that past blessings had begotten present duty:

'God hath granted thee escape from the murderous hands of thy foes and hath bestowed on thee the kingdom thou didst desire. Delay no longer fulfilment of thy third promise but win by obedience to his will thy share in his heavenly kingdom.'

Warned, perhaps, by the example of Albert, Edwin

would not, even at that supreme moment, run the risk of a breach with his witan. 'I want,' he replied, 'to do my duty in embracing the faith I have learnt, but I will first confer with my leading friends and counsellors, in order that, if they agree with me, we may all be baptized together.'

Accordingly, before baby Eanfled was a year old, there was held at Goodmanham, near Market Weighton, about twenty-three miles S.E. of York, an ever memorable witenagemot. One by one, at their beloved king's bidding, the Wise Men of Deira gave their rede about the new faith. Coifi, the chief heathen priest, was the first speaker; and showed by his words, more convincingly than he intended, how unspiritual was his religion and how powerless it had been to refine his coarse nature:

'See to it thyself, O king, what this new lore is worth; but let me assure thee that our old religion is quite worthless. None of thy subjects has practised it more zealously than I: yet many stand higher in thy favour and fare better in all their undertakings. If our gods had any power they would have done more for so faithful a worshipper as I have been. If, therefore, after careful inquiry, thou dost clearly see that more is to be gained by the new religion, let us hasten to adopt it without a moment's delay.'

To this worldly wisdom the second speaker, an ealdorman, assented, but proceeded to raise the discussion to a higher plane:

'Let me tell thee, O king, to what methinks man's life on earth may be compared. Now and then, while thou sittest at supper on a wintry night amid thy ealdormen and thanes, while the fire within sheddeth light and warmth through thy hall, but without rage far and wide chilly blasts and snowstorms, there cometh a sparrow swiftly flying through from door to door. For a few brief seconds it findeth bright and warm shelter, then vanisheth into the wintry gloom whence it came. Even such is man's short

span of life. What was heretofore, what shall be hereafter, none of us knoweth. If, therefore, the new lore sheddeth any light on this dark riddle, methinks it deserveth our allegiance.'

The hearers of this matchless parable, which was doubtless suggested by the actual season, echoed each in turn its closing thought. Coifi then proposed that Paulin himself be heard. The king's leave was, of course, granted, and the bishop, we may feel sure, made the most of his great opportunity. His mien and bearing was rather awe-inspiring; even terrific, than attractive. Tall and slightly bent, black-haired, hollow-cheeked, dark-eyed and hook-nosed, he formed a strong contrast to his broad, stout, blue-eyed and fair-haired hearers. Even to Coifi's grovelling soul his eloquence lent wings. 'Long have I known,' exclaimed the priest of Woden, 'that the objects of our worship were naught, for the more eagerly I sought the less I found truth therein. Now I openly avow that in this new lore shineth clear the truth which can bestow on us the gifts of eternal life, welfare and bliss. Down then with yon useless temples and altars! Curse and burn them!'

To the delight of Paulin the king then publicly renounced idolatry and professed his faith in Christ. He also asked Coifi whose duty it was to take the lead in the work of desecration. 'Mine!' was the prompt answer. 'Who could more fitly, now that God hath given me wisdom, set the example of destroying what in my folly I formerly worshipped!'

It was unlawful for a high priest to bear arms or to ride any beast but a mare. Coifi therefore girded on a sword, grasped a spear, mounted a war stallion lent him by the king and galloped straight down the lane through the grove. The crowd thought him stark mad. As soon as he was near enough he hurled the spear through the door of the wooden temple and loudly bade his followers overthrow and burn it, together with its peaceful precinct, the



Frithgeard, and the idols within. In thus trying to curry favour by renegade thoroughness, that self-seeking courtier probably overshot the mark and only disgusted a king whose inborn sincerity had made it impossible for him lightly to transfer his misplaced allegiance.

Thus memorably was inaugurated the formal acceptance of the Christian faith by the Angles of Deira. The prehistoric *Caer Ebrauc*, the *Eburacum* where Constantine the Great was born, whence a British bishop went to the Council of Arles, and whose massive walls bore then, as now, age-long witness to the majesty of Rome, became once more a seat of empire and a centre of spreading Christian life. Its new citizens spelt it *Eoforwic* and pronounced it very like York. Within a small wooden chapel, hastily built there, Edwin received, on the seven days of the Lenten scrutiny, the regular preparation of a catechumen. On Easter Eve, April 11, 627, together with the two sons of his first wife, the whole assembly of his witan and very many humbler folk, he was baptized in the same chapel by Paulin, who placed his episcopal stool in the city. The ancient Welsh record which goes by the name of Nennius states with emphasis that Edwin was baptized by Rum, son of Urbgen. It has therefore been conjectured that Rum and Paulin are different names of the same person; but it seems probable that Rum was a bishop of the Christian *Kymry* whom Edwin had invited to take part in the ceremony. The dwellers in Lancashire had good reason for thankfulness to the just and merciful king who had slain bloodthirsty Athelfrith; and Edwin may well have hoped that his baptism would increase the loyalty of those subjects. That Urbgen was doubtless the heroic champion of the *Kymry*; and Rum had probably been a disciple of Kentigern.

Soon after his baptism Edwin prepared to build, enclosing the chapel, a stately cathedral of stone, dedicated to St Peter. For the next six years, generally accompanying the king and court in their progress from one royal estate to another, Pau-

lin sowed, with untiring energy, the good seed throughout the length and breadth of Deira and Lindsey. In the hearts of the crowds that welcomed him it sprang up so quickly that he may well have found in the famous parable a forecast of the withering that followed. The two chief centres of his work, Catterick on the Swale and Donafeld or Doncaster, were royal villas. The basilica he built at the latter place was burnt, together with the villa, by the Mercians who defeated and slew Edwin at Hatfield; but the stone altar escaped and was, a century later, being reverently preserved by a priest abbot named Thrydulf, whose monastery stood in a forest glade of Elmet. The baptisms in the Derwent, near the ford of Malton, were so numerous as to win for that reach of the river its present name, Jordan. In Lindsey his first convert was Blacca, king's reeve in the city of Lincoln, who built on Ermine Street, just within the north gate, a fine stone church. The site stands northwest of the present minster and is occupied by the church which, though called St Paul's, was probably dedicated to the memory of Paulin. Early in the year 628 he consecrated in that church Honorius, the successor of Just in the archbishopric of Canterbury.

Many converts were baptized in the Trent, probably near Littleborough, the ford where the river was crossed by the Roman road from York to Lincoln. One of them afterwards gave Deda, the priest abbot of a monastery at Partney near Spilsby, the information we find in the pages of Bede about the fruitfulness of Paulin's work in Lindsey. The corporation seal of Dewsbury preserves the inscription:

PAULINUS HIC PRAEDICAVIT ET CELEBRAVIT

which was found there in Camden's time on an ancient stone cross; but the cross itself has perished, as well as similar crosses at Easingwold, near York, and Whalley in Lancashire. That Dewsbury was the original centre from which

Christianity spread throughout and beyond Calderdale appears from the customary payments made to the rector of Dewsbury, as lately as the eighteenth century, by Huddersfield, Bradford and many other parishes.

So complete had been Edwin's triumph in Wessex that the veteran Cynegils acknowledged his overlordship. On Eorpwald, king of East Anglia, his influence was strong enough to recover for Christ the son and folk of his former protector. With Kent he was closely knit by his marriage. He seemed therefore to have welded together, in ten eventful years, many diverse groups of conquering settlers. By making York his capital he challenged comparison with the Roman rulers of Britain. Even in time of peace he was preceded, wherever he rode, by his mounted standard bearer, holding aloft the royal gold and purple; wherever he walked there was borne before him the banner staff with a tuft of feathers which the Romans called Tufa.

But it soon became clear that national unity could not be firmly built on revengeful ambition. The modern county of Durham, then a forest-clad wilderness, was a natural barrier between his own Deira and conquered Bernicia. He probably raised a political barrier by his conversion. The more high-spirited of his Bernician subjects, loyal to the line of Ida and accustomed to be ruled from Bamborough, would naturally become restive under an alien yoke. To the heathen majority of them Edwin's baptism may well have seemed such an act of disloyalty to his ancestors and theirs as absolved them from their allegiance. There is no reason to suppose that any Bernician ealdormen or thanes were present at the witenagemot of Goodmanham. Of Paulin's work in that province it is related that in one of his journeys he spent thirty-six days at Yevering, near the Cheviots, instructing, catechizing and baptizing all comers from morn till eve; but no Christian emblem, neither chapel, altar nor even cross stood in his time between the Forth and the Tees. Of his presence, however, in the far north the name Pallins-

burn is a memorial. The river Glen which he used for baptizing is now called the Bavent, but the district keeps the name Glendale. The royal vill where the king awaited him was near the village now called Wooler. The church at Brankston known as St Paul's may be regarded as another memorial of his work.

Very soon after his conversion Eorpwald was murdered by one of his heathen thanes named Ricbert. Within three years of that event East Anglia had completely relapsed into heathenism. In the year 626 began the welding of the midland settlers into a strong heathen kingdom, known as Mercia, the march or border land. The welder, Penda the Strenuous, is said to have been already fifty years old when he succeeded Ceorl, the father of Edwin's first wife. His own father, Wibba, was perhaps the man who gave its name to Wibbandun, the scene of Albert's defeat by Ceawlin. He carried his subjects with him in fierce resistance to the new faith and to a Christian overlord. In the year 628 he inflicted on Cynegils and Cwichelm a crushing defeat at Cirencester, thereby wresting from Edwin the overlordship of Wessex. In the following year the defeat at Morpeth by Edwin of Cadwallon, king of Gwynedd, made that ruler, Welsh and Christian though he was, the staunch ally of Penda. As his father was Cadvan, the protector of Edwin's boyhood, the two foes had probably been playfellows.

In the year 631 Edwin welcomed to East Anglia as king the wise and vigorous Sigeberht the Learned, who soon began afresh, with the help of bishop Felix, the task of converting his folk. Cadwallon and Penda resolved to crush Edwin before the completion of this task could unite the forces of two Christian kingdoms. Between the fenland of the Lower Trent and the forest of Elmet passed a narrow strip of firm road which formed the only gateway into Northumbria from the south. There Edwin awaited the onset of his foes. With reckless fury their army plunged into the fen and made its way along sloppy deer tracks from

rise to rise. In one of the northernmost reaches, just south of the Don, on October 12, 633, the Northumbrian host was routed and Edwin himself was slain. Heathfield, or Hatfield, is the name of this momentous defeat, a specimen of what Heine called the grim humour of Providence. Of Edwin's two eldest sons Osfrith fell; Eadfrith gave himself up to Penda and was by him, a few years later, treacherously murdered. Their father's head, severed from his body, was brought to York and exposed in front of his unfinished cathedral over the gateway dedicated to Gregory the Great. By a tragic mishap, in a letter to Edwin, dated June 11, 684, eight months later, Pope Honorius, uninformed of the disaster, commended to his 'most excellent and distinguished son' constant reading of Gregory's works. To the large majority of those Northumbrians whose baptism was then recent or had been hasty, Edwin's downfall must have seemed to condemn the new faith as false. Coifi's time-serving frame of mind was doubtless typical.

Under the escort of a valiant thane named Bassa, queen Athelburh, Paulin and three baptized children fled by sea to Kent. The eldest was Eanfled, the second her son, Wuscfrea, the third Yffi, the infant son of Osfrith. Both boys were soon put out of reach of the restored dynasty of Ida by being sent to Gaul. They found a home at the court of her second cousin, Dagobert I, but soon died. This Bassa may well be the 'mass priest' thus named who founded the abbey of Reculver about thirty-six years later. The queen carried with her to Canterbury much of the royal plate, including a large golden altar cross and a golden chalice. Though her half-brother Eadbald welcomed her, court life had become so distasteful that she founded a convent at Lyminge and there spent the fourteen years of her widowhood. Her memory is still preserved by the visible foundations of her small church, by the well which bears her name and by Tata's Leas. There was already at Folkestone a convent of nuns, said to have been founded

by her niece Eanswith, a daughter of Eadbald. From that king and archbishop Honorius Paulin accepted the long vacant see of Rochester and died there on October 10, 644. Ithamar, who succeeded him, was the first English bishop. About a year after his flight he received from Pope Honorius the pallium which would have invested him with metropolitan dignity at York; but, when the storm before which he fled cleared away, he neither offered, so far as we know, nor was invited to resume charge of his former flock. Like the Cormac who came instead from Iona, he probably felt himself unequal to one of the hardest tasks that was ever tackled by a Christian missionary; but it may fairly be doubted whether this name is fitly given to a man who never shook off the trammels of the courtier nor ventured, as a rule, beyond call of the king's bodyguard. Of this, at least, we may feel sure, that from the moment when he blasphemed his Lord by encouraging Edwin to wreak, in the name of Christ, on the hapless West Saxons, vengeance for a crime he had himself provoked by his own aggression, the mission of Paulin was inevitably, nay mercifully, foredoomed to disastrous failure. His flight puts a wide gulf between him and any son of Urbgen.

One of his deacons, cast in a more heroic mould and full of youthful ardour, stood firm at his post. His name was James; at Hawkswell, near Richmond, and Catterick, midway between the Swale and the Ure, on the ridge which parts their valleys, has been found a small cross bearing, amid simple but rare interlacing patterns, the inscription in relief:

HAEC EST CRUX  
SCI JACOBI.

Such is the plain memorial of a very noble life. The name of the place is still pronounced Yak's Well by the natives. In the neighbourhood, a mile and a half away, on the traditional site of the village where he dwelt, is a farmhouse

called Yakbar and spelt Akebar, past which flows Leeming Beck. From his skill in Roman church music, which he introduced into Northumbria, James was also known as the Chanter. He became precentor of York Minster and survived Paulin about forty years. His orthodoxy and holiness, says Beda, were undoubted; by teaching and baptizing he magnificently despoiled the Ancient Enemy; yet his dies natalis finds no place in any Kalendar of Saints.

Though heathen Penda withdrew his forces after the battle of Hatfield, Christian Cadwallon followed up his victory by a ruthless warfare of extermination. According to Welsh tradition, the conflict between him and Edwin had lasted many years. After several defeats, one of them a conflict so fierce as to be reckoned among the Three Discolourings of the Severn, he had been blockaded in Puffin Island by an English fleet and escaped capture only by taking refuge in Dublin. Having drunk thus deeply of the cup of humiliation he was ready to drain to the dregs his full cup of revenge. Neither woman nor child did this besom of destruction spare as he swept furiously over hill and dale, followed by wild warriors as eager as himself to rid their land of the hated invaders. The Angles of Bernicia elected as their king Eanfrith and recalled him from exile; those of Deira chose Edwin's cousin Osric, who had been baptized by Paulin. Neither king felt strong enough to withstand the revulsion of feeling among his subjects; both professed themselves apostate from Christ and loyal to Woden. In the summer of the following year, 634, while Cadwallon and his Kymry were holding York, Osric rashly besieged the city and fell, mortally wounded, in a vain attempt to stop a sudden sally. In the autumn Eanfrith, escorted by twelve picked thanes, approached Cadwallon to sue for peace and was treacherously murdered.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ADVENT OF OSWALD

And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was none to interpose: therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness, it upheld him.

Isaiah lix, 16.

‘**T**HAT year of disaster, utterly hated by all good men!’  
 ‘A loathsome year!’

So shuddered, a century later, men like Beda when they recalled the agony and apostasy of 634. As a sponge wipes off a slate a wrongly worked sum, so the fury of Cadwallon and his host seemed to have wiped off the face of Northumbria the first attempt to break the power of heathenism in that pair of kingdoms.

When the Christian era was not quite half as old, 40,000 warworn veterans were struggling southward over the passes of Mont Cenis. Their leader Constantine, a native of Eburacum, had for six years been ruling wisely and well the provinces of Spain, Gaul and Britain, and was then launched upon the foolhardy enterprise of wresting Italy from his hostile colleague Maxentius, whose troops, five times as many as his own, were much better equipped. While his horse picked its way amid the slippery scree, his mind, oppressed by the gravity of the crisis, was yearning to stay itself on whichever godhead was really mighty enough to guide the destiny of mankind. Then, against the darkening sky, he saw a bright cross and the words: *NOBIS VINCE*, Herewith conquer! Under a cross as their ensign his legions carried all before them and won, close to the walls of Rome, in October, 312, the famous battle of the Milvian Bridge.



In the darkest of dark hours which brought Oswald news of his eldest brother's death he must have felt that he was by that event called, like Constantine, to play the man in the power of Christ. His age was about thirty; his tender heart so unlike his father's that men compared him to a rose grown from a thornbush. Having collected as many as were willing to follow him, he pitched his camp within view of Cadwallon's host, between seven and eight miles north of Hexham, on a heather-clad natural platform crossed by the Roman Wall. A steep rocky escarpment, rising abruptly from the North Tyne, made the position impregnable on the west. Shielded on his rear by a stout bastion of the wall, Oswald could calmly watch the advance of his foes along the pastures which lay to the north-west. Both he and his men were determined to conquer or die. No longer could they, like their fathers, pick a quarrel with the Kymry for the mere joy of defeating them; theirs was the shameful plight of slaves seeking to win back freedom. When all was ready for battle, he uplifted his spirit in prayer to the God of Columkille and fell asleep on a pillow in his tent. To the pure soul of the champion, as he lay dreaming of the morrow, that saint appeared, shining like an angel, towering aloft among the clouds, revealing himself by name and shielding the camp with his cloak. To Oswald, as to Joshua, came from on high the stirring message:

Be strong and of good courage,  
for the Lord thy God is with thee.  
This very night march from camp to battle;  
here and now hath the Lord granted me  
the flight of thy foes,  
the delivery of Cadwallon into thy hands.

Instead of twelve tribes twelve men, his comrades in exile, then stood with their leader on the side of the Lord; but, hearing of that vision, all his assembled followers,

with such sudden enthusiasm as imminent peril arouses, professed themselves ready to take upon them after the battle the yoke of Christ. By hastily making a large wooden cross and planting it in the rockbound north-west corner of the plateau, Oswald not only gave his men a symbol both of their own newly-formed purpose and of the real meaning of the crisis, but also claimed for Christ the soil of Bernicia, hitherto unhallowed by any Christian emblem. With his own hands he held the cross upright in its pit while his men piled firm earth round its foot. Then, at his bidding, all knelt in united prayer to the almighty, living and true God for protection against their fierce and proud foe:

for Thou thyself knowest  
that our cause is just  
and that the welfare of our race is at stake.

In the early dawn of a winter morning the Angles, though far outnumbered by the Kymry, charged with irresistible vigour down the fellside. The battle rolled eastwards; at Hallington, about two miles from the cross, the invaders tried but failed to make a stand against their impetuous foes. Cut off from retreat by the way he had come, their chieftain led them across the wall and sped southward over the wild moor, hotly pursued. Through the heather they ran pell-mell, down the green banks, and forded the Tyne. The rout ended in a tributary beck of Rowley Water, about nine miles from the cross, amid an entangling network of thickets and streams. Four centuries later, in the mouths of gleemen, the awestruck comment was still current:

The slaying of Cadwallon  
Checked the flow of Denis.

Even so had the river Tiber been stained with the blood of drowning Maxentius.

Thus, within fifteen months of the Hatfield disaster, was

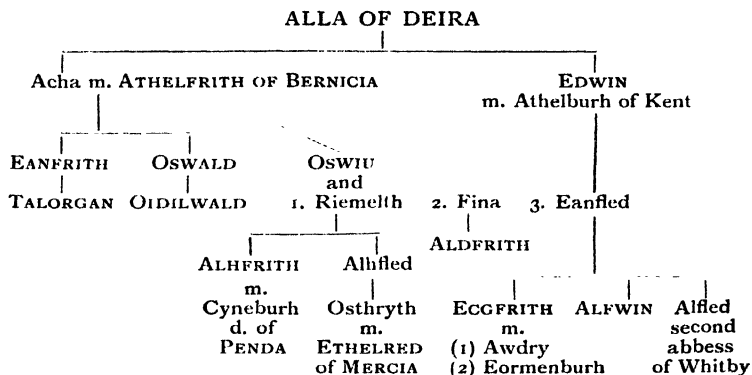
won, by a supreme venture of faith, across the line of the Great Wall, the decisive but not quite final battle of the long struggle between Angle and Brythton for the northernmost province of the Roman Empire. Though the site of Oswald's camp had been, time out of mind, called Hefenfeld, on account of its lofty situation, the name derived new meaning from this victory. It is now called St Oswald's, and a small chapel probably covers the spot where the cross was set up. It may be matter for glad wonder, but hardly for cold unbelief, that turf cut from the Heaven's Field on which Oswald's cross was planted, and splinters of the cross itself, became instruments of such healing power as lies beyond human ken.

Not far from the spot where Cadwallon fell, on the stream called Devilswater, is a coign of vantage called Linnels, where, on May 8, 1464, at the head of 500 dispirited followers, the hapless Henry VI awaited the fierce onset of many thousand Yorkists, led by Lord Montagu, a brother of the Earl of Warwick. This camp, like Oswald's naturally fortified, lies on the long slope of a hill which rises from the Tyne, is flanked by a steep escarpment and guarded in the rear by rough, broken ground. As he fled headlong and narrowly escaped his pursuers, that pious victim of greedy ambition may have bitterly rued the contrast between the two battles.

On the ground that Eanfrith and Osric had by their apostasy become mere usurpers, Oswald's reign, thus won by the sword, was reckoned from Edwin's death. As son of Athelfrith, he was lineal heir to the throne of Bernicia; as nephew of Edwin, he had a good claim on the favour of Deira. Everywhere, as he was, in accordance with custom, borne aloft on a shield by four stalwart thanes, the hero who had rescued his folk from the fury of the Kymry must have been heartily, nay uproariously, welcomed. In choosing for his headquarters sublime, storm-swept Bamborough, instead of sheltered York, he naturally followed the custom

of his house, but may well have made the nobles of Deira jealous at the withdrawal of a privilege to which their ancient city seemed entitled by its imperial past and themselves by their superior wealth and culture. He completed there the stone church which Edwin had begun to build.

The modern county of Durham, between the Tees and the Tyne, was then a kind of No Man's Land, which had never been cleared for cultivation. Geographically therefore Deira and Bernicia were parted by a formidable barrier and linked only by the Roman military road which threaded that wilderness. The land at Monkwearmouth on which, forty years later, Benedict Biscop founded his famous monastery, was probably even then virgin soil.



## CHAPTER VII

### AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE, APOSTLE OF NORTHUMBRIA

He wayted after no pomp and reverence,  
Ne maked him a spyced conscience,  
But Cristes lore, and his apostles twelve,  
He taught, and first he folwed it himselve.

Chaucer, Prologue to Canterbury Tales, 525 to 528.

The tide did now its floodmark gain,  
And girdled in the Saint's domain:  
For, with the flow and ebb, its style  
Varies from continent to isle:  
Dryshod, o'er sands, twice every day,  
The pilgrims to the shrine find way:  
Twice every day the waves efface  
Of staves and sandalled feet the trace.

Marmion, Canto II, ix

**O**SWALD was, of course, filled with a strong desire to see all his subjects clad in the Christian armour which had won him the crown. His eyes naturally turned to his own spiritual home in Icolmkill, then ruled by abbot Seghine. A bishop named Corman was promptly sent in answer to his request, but was so harsh and stern that the Northumbrians turned a deaf ear to his preaching. He returned crestfallen, and reported to the assembled rulers of the Scotie Church that nothing could be done for such stubborn and hardhearted folk. In the quaint words of Thomas Fuller, 'Hard with hard, saith the proverb, makes no wall; and no wonder if the spiritual building went on no better, wherein the austerity and harshness of the pastor met with the ignorance and sturdiness of the people.' An anxious discussion followed the distressing news, but was cut short by a shrewd homethrust:



BAMBOROUGH



LINDISFARNE



‘Methinks, brother, thou wert unduly hard on unlearned hearers. Thou oughtest, as the apostle directs, to have first offered them the milk of gently graded lore, until they were fit to receive the strong meat of doctrine which points upwards to inaccessible heights.’

He may also have reminded him of the sound method underlying the ironical words (Isaiah xxviii, 10, 13):

Precept upon precept, precept upon precept;  
line upon line, line upon line;  
here a little, there a little.

All eyes were turned towards the speaker; so full did he seem of the mother grace Discretion that on him inevitably fell the choice of the assembly. Never, perhaps, was such a choice so amply justified. The monk's name was Aidan. His lineage gave him kinship with Brigid of Kildare. He was duly consecrated bishop; doubtless by some of the bishops who were then working near Iona. In the summer of 635, ten years after the entry into Northumbria of Paulin, he brought the whole strength of his ardent and sympathetic nature to bear on the task which had been abandoned by the crafty and persevering but cold and unheroic court chaplain. Thanks to his work and example, England began, twenty years later, to deserve the name of a Christian country. In welcoming him to his realm Oswald was doubtless linking afresh the chain of fellowship with an old friend, who may even have been one of his teachers.

Sheltered on the south by the frowning fortress of Bamborough is a bleak and bare island, which must have seemed to Aidan specially placed there to become for him a second Iona. It is formed by a bifurcation of the estuary of the river Lindis and thence called Lindisfarne, that is, Recess of Lindis. In shape it is roughly a square, measuring diagonally two miles. It was then, and is now, detached from the mainland only at high tide, by a depth of from five to seven feet of water. ‘Twice a day did a belt of living



water encircle that little sanctuary; and when it was ungirt there were the quicksand and the shoal.' So far from safe is the passage to and fro that between 1584 and 1802 the quicksand and the shoal proved fatal to eighteen persons.

There, somewhat perhaps to the disappointment of the Christian remnant gathered round James in Deira, the new bishop placed his stool. The island was well fitted by its peaceful seclusion for the training of clergy and the teaching of boys; for the establishment in fact, to use a modern phrase, of a white-hot centre of spiritual effort. The monastic rule of Iona was closely followed at Lindisfarne. Aidan was first abbot of his own monastery, but his successors in the bishopric surrendered the abbacy to another monk, chosen in conference with the whole community of brethren. The first group of rough wooden buildings were plundered by Danes in the year 793 and afterwards destroyed by another swarm of those ruthless invaders. The extensive ruins which Scott described as a 'solemn, huge and dark red pile,' are the remains of the Benedictine offshoot of Durham, established there in 1082.

'During low water,' wrote James Raine the elder, 'the interval between Lindisfarne and the mainland looks flat and dreary; except the occasional whistle of a curlew, or the silver wing of the seamew sparkling in the sun, there is nothing to amuse either eye or ear. But reach the island and recollect that here stood the first church between the Tees and the Firth of Forth; that of this church, the seat of sixteen successive bishops, not a vestige remains, and that a second structure, reared on its foundations, is almost level with the ground; and there is enough to engage both eye and mind.'

The name Holy Island was first used in 1093 by bishop William of St Carileph, the leading founder of the second church, and had reference not only to the lives of Aidan and Cuthbert, but to the blood of holy men shed there by heathen Vikings. In Welsh records the island is called Met-

caud. There, if tradition may be trusted, the Bernician Angles and their king Theodoric were shut up by Urien for three days and nights. Fortunately for them, sheer envy of eminent greatness so maddened another leader of the Kymry, named Morcant, that Urien fell in that campaign, the victim of an assassin's dagger. In the elegy of his bard friend, Llywarch Hen, that famous leader sheds his glory down the ages:

An eagle to his foe in the thrust, brave as generous:  
In the angry warfare certain of victory  
Was Urien, ardent in his grasp.

. . . . .

I bear by my side a head,  
The head of Urien!  
The courteous leader of his army!  
But on his white bosom the raven is feeding.

Aidan's life was completely consistent with the faith he taught. Careless of this world's goods, he found joy in giving away, as fast as he could, to the poor men he met the presents he received from the rich. Scorning the luxury of a horse, except for crossing deep rivers, he walked with nimble tread whithersoever the Spirit led him. Not only to towns and villages, but to all the lonely homesteads on every bleak moor, he bore the glad tidings, turning aside to greet every wayfarer he met, whether rich or poor, believer or unbeliever. The faith of the believer he strengthened and made fruitful of alms and good works. Unbelievers he invited to share the secret which made his own countenance the radiant mirror of a glowing soul. With him marched a goodly band of lay disciples, some tonsured, others not so, all of whom spent much time every day in searching the Scriptures and learning or reciting the Psalms. The houses were offered in churches, built, at his instance, of timber, wattle and thatch. Very few of those churches were, in that missionary period, served by resident clergy. He set the

example of fasting till three o'clock in the afternoon on Wednesday and Friday throughout the year, except between Easter and Whitsuntide. His example was followed by all who had taken vows, both men and women. This particular custom had been the standard of the Church from the time of Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria. The Egyptian monks of the Thebaid took it from Pakhom, whose rule became known in the West from the writings of Jerome. When, as rarely happened, the bishop accepted an invitation to the king's banqueting hall, he entered with one or two clergy, refreshed himself sparingly and sped back to reading or prayer. Neither fear nor regard for rank muzzled him in presence of a guilty sinner or mitigated the sternness of his rebuke. Instead of trying to win favour for himself by the customary money gifts to his more powerful guests, he loved to ransom slaves with the large sums which rich men placed at his disposal. Many of those who thus owed their freedom to his bounty afterwards became his pupils and were trained for priesthood.

From Iona and its neighbourhood came into Northumbria, at Aidan's bidding, a devoted band of fellow workers, chiefly monks, but also many priests, who soon began to scatter, far and wide, monastic schools, liberally endowed by the king. These became the crowded resorts of ardent seekers and glad finders, men as well as boys. In the mother house at Lindisfarne a college of twelve picked English lads were trained under the bishop's own eye by Scotie foster-fathers. One of the twelve, Ceadda, became famous as St Chad; to another, Eata, Cuthbert owed his monastic training at Melrose and Ripon. Following the example of Columkille, Aidan would now and then retire for the refreshment of prayerful solitude to the islet Farne, now known as House Island. From the Irish kalendars we learn that he had formerly dwelt on another Farne, now called Scatterry Island, county Clare, in the estuary of the Shannon.

## CHAPTER VIII

OSWALD, CYNEGILS AND BIRIN, APOSTLE OF  
WESSEX

\* Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? . . .  
Here am I, send me. Isaiah vi, 8.

**W**HILE Northumbria was groaning under the vindictive rage of Cadwallon and his Welsh, a true missionary was pacing the quays of Genoa in order to learn from Saxon sailors the language spoken by the new masters of Britain. His name, Birin, so closely resembles Byrne that he may well have been trained at Luxeuil, whither the fame of Columban had attracted a stream of recruits from Ireland. That monastery had then been for many years the only continental centre of missionary enterprise.

There is no good authority for calling him a monk of St Andrew's on the Cœlian. Comparison of dates makes it just possible, though improbable, that he was aware of the Hatfield disaster before his call became clear. More probably the disappointment felt in Rome at the meagre fruit of Austin's mission made his offer of service doubly welcome.

Birin promised his counsellor, Pope Honorius, to scatter the good seed of the true faith among the Angles and Saxons of mid-Britain, whither no teacher had yet penetrated. He was consecrated bishop at Genoa by Asteri, bishop of Milan, whose close connexion with Bobbio, the eldest daughter house of Luxeuil, may have caused him to be chosen. Just before embarkation Birin fortified himself and his companions against the perils of the voyage by sharing with them sacramental food. His altar cloth was a small piece of linen given him by the Pope, in which, after every mass, he used to wrap a fragment of the consecrated bread

and hang it round his neck as an amulet. In the bustle of departure he left it behind and missed it when the ship was under way. Then he leapt overboard and recovered his treasure while the crew awaited him.

After he had landed on the shore of Southampton Water, so called from the Ham-tun or hometown of the early settlers, Birin found the West Saxons still groping in thick heathen darkness, and therefore abandoned, at least for a time, his intention of proceeding beyond them. Their domain included, eastward of Selwood Forest, which barred their way, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire and Surrey; northward also of the Thames, the shires of Oxford, Buckingham and Bedford. Their neighbours, the West Welsh of Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, were by nature so hardy and, thanks to trade and travel, so intelligent that they strengthened the mettle of the invaders, first by stubborn resistance, then by gradual coalescence. In the year 577 a victory won by Ceawlin at Deorham or Dyrham in the Cotswolds opened to his followers the shires of Gloucester and Worcester, together with a part of Somerset which has been fitly named the land of Bath; but, after his defeat at Faddiley in Cheshire had hurled back his advancing force down the valley of the Severn, a rebellion of his own subjects detached those counties from Wessex. The Hwiccas, so the rebels were called, chose for their king his nephew Ceolric and allied themselves with their Welsh neighbours. In the year 592 the combined forces defeated Ceawlin, shortly before his death, at Wanborough, on the edge of the chalk downs. In that name, as in many others, Wan is merely short for Woden, the common divine ancestor of every English king, from whom is named the fourth day of the week. Ceolric united for a while the distracted kingdom; after him his brother, Ceolwulf, was incessantly fighting against Mercian Angles as well as against Welsh. In the year 611, when their nephew Cynegils had succeeded him, the Welsh penetrated far into Wessex, but were

routed, three years later, with heavy slaughter, at Bampton in Oxfordshire. In the year 628, after the fiercely contested battle of Cirencester between Cynegils and Penda, the land of the Hwiccas was again detached from Wessex and, either then or later, became part of Mercia.

So quickly did Birin's knowledge of the Wessex dialect enable him to win the hearts of his hearers that, while Oswald was reaping the first-fruits of his victory at Hevenfeld, the veteran Cynegils, in the twenty-fifth year of his reign, submitted like Edwin to the training of a catechumen. Of no other English king is this fact clearly recorded. Feeling, we may fairly suppose, too weak to face alone the growing power of Penda, he sought the alliance of Oswald and persuaded him to visit Wessex. They soon became doubly bound, each to the other; nay triply, for both claimed as their common ancestor Balder, or Pol, that son of Woden the myth of whose resurrection formed for every Angle or Saxon the stepping-stone from sun-worship to loving adoration of the risen and living Christ.

'The Saxon Dorcic,' wrote William Bright, 'the more ancient *Caer Dauri*, retaining traces of the Roman *Dorcina*, is guarded southward by the embankment still called the Dykes, and beyond them by the twin clumps of the mighty hill fort *Sinodun*, whence Britons had in Roman days been dislodged by *Aulus Plautius*. Briton and Roman have passed away from the Thames Valley; there are kings here now, representing *Ida the Flamebearer* and *Cerdic the founder of a realm which is to absorb the rest*; but the kingdom here evidently set forth is not from this world. There, in white pontificals, with attendant clergy on either side, stands its foreign representative, deriving his commission from the mighty Roman Church, and his episcopate from the great see of *St Ambrose*: a font, large enough for immersion, is solemnly hallowed; the war-worn royal convert steps into it and is baptized; as he comes forth from the laver he is lifted up, according to the usual rite, by the future son-in-law, who now acts as his sponsor and who

invests, for us, that riverside with the noble associations that attend the name of our truest royal saint.'

After the baptism Oswald was joined in holy wedlock to Cyneburh, the daughter of Cynegils. She also had presumably been baptized after due probation. Then both kings granted Dorcic to Birin as the see of his bishopric. It is now the village Dorchester, on the left bank of the Thames, about seven miles below Oxford. The joint act perhaps amounted to a recognition by Cynegils of the overlordship which is implied by the title Bretwalda; but it may have been merely intended to give the bishop a double guarantee of protection.

In the following year, 636, Cwichelm, alarmed by illness, was baptized by Birin and also died. His son Cuthred became sub-king in his place, but remained heathen till the year 639. Then Birin not only baptized him but became his godfather. The defeat and death of Oswald in 642 was soon followed by the death of Cynegils and the expulsion of his heathen successor, Cenwealh. The part of Birin's diocese that lay northward of the Thames then probably became for a while subject to heathen Penda; but the bishop seems to have stood firm at his post, loyally supported, we may feel sure, by his converts. Of his work Beda tells us only that he built and dedicated churches, and called many peoples to the Lord by his loving toil. This plural seems to imply that he had faithfully kept his promise to the Pope by making converts not only in those three shires, but even beyond. His choice of a see so far north may well have been determined by such a purpose. It seems the reverse of improbable that among his Mercian converts were Cyneswith, wife of Penda, her daughter Cyneburh and the other daughter who bore her own name. The full record of his work would probably place him in the front rank of Christian missionaries.

In the year 646 he presumably heard with deep thankful-

ness that Cenwealh had been baptized by Felix. Two years later the restoration of that king was accomplished by his nephew Cuthrēd, but Birin had then almost finished his earthly course. At the end of sixteen strenuous and fruitful years he entered, on December 3, 650, into the joy of his Lord. His body lay at Dorcic till it was removed by bishop Haddi to Winchester and entombed in the Church of St Peter and St Paul. '

Among the subjects discussed by Oswald and Birin while they communed together was doubtless the momentous refusal of Seghine, abbot of Iona, to adopt, at the instance of pope Honorius, the catholic reckoning of Easter. An obsolete reckoning was brought thence by Aidan, if not into Deira, at least into Bernicia; but so clearly was he bound by the custom of those who had sent him, and so fruitful of good works was his devout and loving faith, that during his lifetime the diversity was not resented by those of his flock who adhered to the custom they had learnt from Paulin or James.



## CHAPTER IX OSWALD AND AIDAN

Kindness and truth are met together:  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Ps. lxxxv, 10.

**C**HIEF among Aidan's helpers was Oswald, who had, of course, during his long exile, thoroughly learnt Gaelic, the language of the Scots. To his ealdormen and the thanes of his bodyguard the king himself interpreted the preaching of the bishop, who began with a scanty knowledge of English. Hardly less glowing than Aidan's was his own personal piety. Thus was given to all his unruly subjects a beautiful object lesson in brotherly co-operation of State with Church for the common weal.

It seems probable that one of Aidan's first acts was to consecrate Oswald, according to the example of Columkille, by using, for the first time in England, prayers and ritual similar to those which were lately used at the consecration of Edward VII. First among the rites came the anointing of his head with 'oil of gladness' as a symbol of sanctification and of royal priesthood. Then, jointly with the ealdormen, the bishop gave the sceptre into the king's hand, and finally placed a helmet on his head.

Having won spiritual kingship unknown to his forefathers Oswald soon took the sixth place in the line of Bretwaldas by extending his sway further than the limits of Edwin's; but he regarded his wide domain as a holy fief, for which homage was due to the One God who made heaven and earth. He received the submission of all four races—the Brythons of Strathclyde and Cumbria, the Lowland Picts, the Argyle Scots, as well as the Northumbrian Angles. In body he was tall, broad-shouldered, long-armed and large-handed.

Pale yellow was the colour of his flowing locks; blue of his flashing eyes. On the chin of his long and beaming face he wore a thin beard. Round his firmly closed thin lips always played a gentle smile.

The treacherous murder by Penda of Edwin's second son, Eadfrith, who had taken refuge at his court, was probably due to his desire to find favour with Oswald, whom we would fain believe guiltless of his rival's blood; but the matter is not free from doubt. The Lindiswara, or men of Lindsey, the modern Lincolnshire, were subdued by force of arms. About forty years later, when the slain king's headless and armless skeleton was brought on a wagon by his niece Osthryth, queen consort of Mercia, from Oswestry to the gate of her monastery at Bardney, the bitter memories of that struggle made the monks reluctant to admit the relic within their precinct. East Anglia, under the Christian kings Sigeberht and Ecgric, readily acknowledged his overlordship and relied on his protection.

Though raised to such a high pinnacle of power Oswald nevertheless always treated poor folk and wayfarers with kindness and generosity, so humbly bestowed that men marvelled at its strangeness. One Easter Day Aidan was seated beside him at the head of the board in the royal hall; before them had been set a silver dish piled high with savoury meat. Both were on the point of outstretching hands over the food in a solemn act of blessing. They were stayed by the sudden entry of the king's almoner, who brought news that the courtyards were filled with a crowd of beggars, arriving from every point of the compass, to demand alms of the king. To the dismay of the hungry thanes who had been sharpening their teeth round the festive board, Oswald promptly gave orders for the festal food to be carried thence to the starving beggars, and for the dish itself to be shivered into such small fragments that each might receive a piece of silver. Aidan's eyes gleamed with joy at his royal pupil's likeness to Him who had com-

passion on the fasting multitude. Affectionately grasping the other's right hand, 'Never,' cried he, 'may this hand grow old!'

In accordance with this prayer, so Beda assures his readers, Oswald's hands and arms had not begun to decay in his own time, nearly a century after that king's death. They were preserved in a silver casket, which was kept in St Peter's Church, Bamborough. Again Thomas Fuller is worth quoting. 'For my own part, I conceive that Aidan's words to Oswald were spiritually spoken in a mystical meaning. The bountiful hand never consumes; neither actually, it never wastes or impairs any state, God so ordering it that the more he giveth the more he hath; nor passively, it is not consumed, the acts thereof remaining in a perpetual memorial here and hereafter.'

In the Welsh records Oswald is honourably distinguished from his father, the Destroyer, and his great uncle, the Flamebearer, by the epithet *Lamnguin*, which means open-handed.

In 636, the year after Oswald welcomed Aidan to Bamborough, a band of Christian missionaries from Persia arrived at Si-an-fu in China, then the capital of the beneficent T'ang dynasty and now of the province Shensi. They were Nestorians, unable or unwilling to distinguish two natures in their Saviour, the divine and the human. Their leader, Olopen, was kindly received by the Confucianist Emperor, T'ai Tsung, and remained three years at the court, finding eager listeners among the princes and nobles who flocked from far and near to the famous university. There, in the year 639, after he had completed in the immense library a Chinese translation of the Holy Scriptures, an imperial edict ordered the magistrates to build a Christian Church in the quarter named I-ning (Justice and Mercy) of the city. T'ai Tsung stands at least as high as Oswald among good and wise rulers.

## CHAPTER X

### THE HALLOWING OF OSWALD

Whom the Lord loyeth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every  
son whom He receiveth. Heb. xii, 6.

**T**HE second son of Athelfrith was found worthy to be made perfect through suffering. At the very time when the fertility of his land and the wealth of his subjects seemed to be rewarding the holiness of his life, that frequent scourge of medieval Europe, the bubonic plague, fell ruthlessly on every Northumbrian home. Oswald bowed beneath the chastening hand of God and laid the blame on his own sins. Moved very often to tears by his people's woe, he used to groan forth his heartache in plaintive prayer:

It is I that have sinned and gone astray.  
Those mere sheep, what have they deserved ?  
Against me, O Lord, and my house  
let the sword of thy vengeance be turned,  
as justly due to the wickedness of me or mine.

He was taken at his word. The plague fell on him with sudden fury; the hue of health faded from his flesh; his limbs grew numb and stiff; anguish of mind made the sweat of his aching body more profuse; in his utter weakness his spirit sank within him as his best thanes were mown down. At one moment his bones rattled shivering; at another unbearable heat was burning his entrails. Feverish and faint by turns, he foretold to his assembled friends that his end was nigh. Tears flooded their cheeks; they groaned and beat their breasts till the din of their grief filled the fortress. While bishop and clergy were pleading with earnest prayers for his recovery, he received his part-

ing housel. His breath began to fail, his chest nearly ceased to heave, his upward gaze was far away, his lips moved as though within him spirit were holding communion with spirit. He was afterwards wont to tell how, at that supreme moment, with unclouded eyes of mind and body, he had a clear vision of angelic beings, three of whom came down to him with a message of comfort :

Oswald, God's chosen king,  
let go thy dread of death,  
for in heaven thou art reckoned  
as one with us in heart and fellowship;  
when thy course is run, among us wilt thou be enrolled.  
Not yet art thou destined to die,  
nor wilt thou any longer be stricken with fell disease.  
On thy distress Christ hath had compassion;  
to thy prayers He hath granted deliverance of thee and  
thy people;  
with tender loving kindness He hath added years to thy  
life.  
By His decree thine will be a martyr's end.  
Henceforward, in life and in death  
we are His appointed guardians of thee.

The beloved king then quickly recovered and began to lead a more flawless life, joyfully awaiting the promised consummation. His wife, Cyneburh, who had borne him a son named Oidilwald, joined him in his lofty aim. This English Josiah became more and more constant in prayer, very often remaining on his knees after nocturns till the sun had fully risen. Wherever he sat, the palms of his hands were turned upwards as they rested on his knees, in the customary attitude of thankful adoration.

Even so, six centuries later, at Pontoise, did the nearly fatal fever of Saint Louis, then thirty years old, fill his realm with mournful anxiety. He fell into a swoon so death-like that his chief nurse covered his face. Then, as Joinville tells the tale, our Lord worked in him, he began to sigh, his

arms and legs stirred, and in the hollow voice of a reviving corpse he uttered these words:

By God's grace the dayspring from on high hath visited  
me  
and brought me back from the shadow of death.

Forthwith he summoned the bishops of Paris and Meaux, demanded from them the crusader's cross and overcame their reluctance by declaring that he would neither eat nor drink till they had given it him. From the bishop of Paris he joyfully took the holy symbol of his quixotic purpose, kissed it and laid it gently on his breast. The next ten years of his life bore memorable fruit in one of those high failures which overleap the bound of low successes.

Under king Penda the united Mercians were becoming so strong as to be dangerous to their Christian neighbours. Oswald therefore invaded that kingdom and at first so prevailed that his enemy retreated into Wales. There however Penda strengthened himself by an alliance with Cadwalader, son of Cadwallon. Consequently, a battle fought, on August 5, 642, in the marchland of Shropshire proved no less disastrous to Oswald than Hatfield had been to his uncle Edwin. His foes closed round him; he saw that his hour had come. As he fell he prayed for his army. 'God have mercy on their souls, said falling Oswald' became a household word. The scene of the battle was called Maserfeld, but cannot be certainly identified. Tradition places it near Oswestry, a shortened form of Oswald's Tree. According to a legend which foreshadowed the story of the Boscobel Oak a decaying ash tree near the spot where he fell was marvellously revived. Lays of gleemen long told how

White with bones of saints  
Lies the plain of Maserfield.

The bloodthirsty victor ordered his victim's head and

arms to be cut off and publicly exposed on wooden stakes. A year later they were rescued by Oswiu, the new king of Bernicia. The head was reverently buried at Lindisfarne by sorrowful Aidan; the arms, as noted above, were enshrined at Bamborough. Healing power was long believed to reside in splinters of the stake upon which his head was impaled, and in dust taken from the spot where he fell. Though no more than a few handfuls were taken at a time, so much had soon been removed that the depth of the hole thus made was equal to the height of a man.

Not long after the battle, according to the tradition current a century later, a Welsh wayfarer, passing the battlefield and noticing there an area greener and fairer than the rest, shrewdly guessed that an exceptionally holy man had been slain on that spot. He accordingly bound in his girdle a few handfuls of the turf, hoping it might prove to have healing virtue. At eventide he found welcome and good cheer in a house where a party of villagers were feasting. Before he joined them he hung his well-filled girdle on a partition post of the sleeping quarters. Deep drinking made the midnight revellers so heedless that some sparks from the blazing fire round which they sat kindled the woven turfs and straw of the thatched roof. They all fled in dazed dismay; the house was burnt to the ground, all but that post and its load, which were not even scorched. When the reason had been explained and the fame of the marvel had spread far and wide, many betook themselves to the spot where Oswald had fallen, in search of healing for themselves or their kinsfolk, and were not disappointed.

About thirty years after his death Oswald's headless and armless skeleton was removed by order of his niece, queen Osthryth, from its grave on the battlefield to the monastery which had been built at Bardney in Lindsey by her husband Ethelred, king of the Mercians. There she often dwelt, and thither, seven years after her death, he retired, exchanging his crown for the coronal tonsure. The reluctance

already mentioned of the monks to receive it is said to have been overcome by the appearance of a column of light which shone all night on the wagon left standing with its precious burden outside the gates. About ten years later, in the monastery founded at Selsey by Wilfrith, a boy, dying of the plague on Oswald's day, dreamt that by the saint's intercession the plague had been stayed from harming the monks; and the dream came true. How deep an impression Oswald's character had made on men's minds may be gathered from the subsequent history of his relics and the widely spread cult of his fame.

His head rested in his tomb at Lindisfarne for more than two centuries. Then in 875 fear of the Vikings drove the monks to the mainland of Northumbria. Oswald's head and Cuthbert's body shared their wanderings, first to Chester-le-Street, then to Ripon and finally to Durham. The arms were preserved for some time at Bamborough but afterwards removed, one to Peterborough and thence to Ely, the other probably to Durham but perhaps to Gloucester. From Bardney, in the year 909, all but three of the other bones that had not already gone abroad were put out of reach of the Vikings by removal to the monastery which Ethelred of Mercia and his lady Ethelfled, Alfred's famous daughter, had built in Oswald's honour at Gloucester. Other bones were taken to Frisia by Wilbrord, whose monastery at Epternach possessed a head, believed to be Oswald's, and kept his day as a festival. Tauris and Tai, two villages in the Venetian Alps, disputed the possession of one of his fingers; one of his teeth found its way to Tegernsee in Bavaria. Relics were also shown in the thirteenth century at Prűffing, Ramshofen and Wettingen; in the fifteenth century churches of St Maria ad Martyres and St Eucharius at Trier; also, as late as the eighteenth century, in Lisbon, in the abbey of Our Lady at Soissons, and in two towns of Swabia, Herford and Weingarten. In the twelfth century, at Bamberg, a chapel was dedicated to him in the monas-



tery of St Michael; in the thirteenth, altars at Prague and Altenmünster in Bavaria, chapels at St Emmeran (Ratisbon), Oberlonon near Meran (Tyrol), Hollenthal (Schwarzwald) and Weingarten. Many villages named St Oswald nestle among the Alpine highlands. In the annals of Hamburg the solar eclipse of 1263 is correctly referred to his day. In 1769, at Udine, was printed an Italian life of Oswald, dedicated to the archbishop of that city. Its author, Giam Pietro della Stua, had found traces of his cult not only there but in Constance, Köln, Mainz, Munster and Salzburg. All this may be regarded as evidence of the strong inspiration his bright example shed on the bold English missionaries who overthrew the idols of northern Europe and erected crosses in their stead.

Of Oswald's widow Cyneburh nothing more is recorded than that, yielding to the advice of Osthryth, she became a nun; when or where can hardly even be guessed.

## CHAPTER XI

### OSWINI AND AIDAN

Lovely and pleasant were they in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. 2 Sam. i, 23.

**I**N the summer of 634, after Osric had been slain outside the walls of York, his young son, Oswini, was hurried out of Deira by their kinsfolk, under the protection of some of his father's companion thanes. The boy had probably been baptized by Paulin. The refugees found shelter in Wessex, where Birin was just beginning his fruitful mission work. They doubtless witnessed, in the following year, the baptism of Cynegils and the wedding of Oswald. Oswini may well have joined in the hero worship bestowed on the younger king and have won the fatherly affection of both. A few months later he may have witnessed the baptism of Cwichelm, whose name is preserved in the tree-crowned Berkshire height Cuckamsley. The young exile was watchfully biding his time when news of the Maserfeld disaster fell, like a bolt from the blue, on every Christian community in England. In the year 643 died his protector, Cynegils, in much bitterness of spirit that his second son and successor, Cenwealh, who had married a sister of Penda, was still inflexibly heathen. Escorted by his thanes, Oswini then returned to Deira, was heartily and honourably welcomed by all classes and, a year or so later, in a full witenagemot, unanimously elected king; but was compelled to acknowledge Penda as his overlord.

Meanwhile Oswiu, the third son of Athelfrith but only half brother of Oswald, had been elected king of Bernicia. His mother is said to have been a mere concubine. A lady named Riemelth, probably Welsh, had borne him a son, Alhfrith, and a daughter, Alhfled. Another son, Aldfrith,

had for his mother a Scotie lady named Fina and was therefore called in Ireland Fland Fina. For his wife Oswiu chose Eanfled, daughter of Edwin and Athelburh; who was living in Kent with her kinsfolk. He sent by land a priest named Utta to fetch her, but, as Penda's hostility made the land journey unsafe, bade him bring her to Bamborough by sea. In response to Utta's request for a blessing on the expedition Aidan foretold a storm and gave him a flask of hallowed oil to pour on the troubled waters. Consequently, when the storm took place and the oil calmed the sea, the bishop was credited with prophetic and wonder-working power. Eanfled brought with her a priest named Romanus and kept Easter according to the catholic reckoning, at variance with her husband and his Christian subjects. In the years 645, 647, 648 and 651, accordingly, Oswiu and his courtiers were enjoying their Easter banquet while Eanfled and her maidens were preparing, on their Palm Sunday, for the passiontide fast. By this marriage Oswiu doubtless hoped to win, sooner or later, the allegiance of Deira. Of his personal intercourse with Aidan there is no record; in the light of subsequent events it seems probable that the two men were sundered by some antipathy. In order to keep united the Northumbrian Church Aidan probably spent more time than hitherto in the southern kingdom and let his pupils take charge of the northern.

The first dozen years of Oswiu's reign were disturbed by the devastating raids of Penda and his Mercians. In one of the earliest that ruthless veteran led his host as far as the royal stronghold of Bamborough, but could not take it by assault or siege. He therefore pulled down the neighbouring huts and piled them up against the walls in a mass of timber, brushwood and thatch. Then, in a wind which drove the flames on the town, he set fire to the pile. Aidan, as it happened, was at that critical moment enjoying one of his periods of prayerful retirement on the islet Farne, about two miles away. The welfare of his divided diocese was

doubtless at such times uppermost in his thoughts. Thence he caught sight of smoke and flames borne aloft by gales of wind over the doomed walls. His eyes and hands were uplifted, tears streamed down his cheeks, the agonized cry burst from his lips, 'See, Lord, how Penda makes havoc!' As he spoke the wind veered round on the men that had lighted the fire, and the scorching flames swifled backward. Some were hurt and all were too scared to continue their attack on a place so clearly favoured by God.

Unlike his father, Oswini was a consistent Christian and so humble-minded that he became even more dear to Aidan than Oswald himself had been. They often communed together about despising the world and enjoying the beauty of holiness. The king took the bishop for an inspired angel; the bishop loved the king as his own soul, sometimes upbraiding him as a son for being too much occupied in worldly affairs, at other times rousing and refreshing him as a bosom friend with spiritual admonitions. Tall and handsome, Oswini won all hearts by his gentle manners and kindly flow of talk. To high and low alike his generosity was open-handed and boundless. From every quarter of Britain men of the best families flocked to the service of a king whose deeds and thoughts were as royal as his face and stature. Poor men he put at their ease by treating them as equals; in his presence rich men could not help feeling their own inferiority, yet were neither envious nor jealous of his greatness.

Beda tells us that the successors of Edwin built themselves, instead of the burnt villa at Donafeld or Doncaster, another in the neighbourhood of Leeds. The site is now covered by the village Oswinthorpe, wrongly spelt Osmundthorpe, where on August 20, 1774, was found a gold coin of Justinian which may well have been handled by Oswini. How persistent was the gratitude of his subjects to Edwin's friend Radwald appears from an ancient stained glass pic-

ture of that king, decorated with the arms of East Anglia, which was found in the village church.

In order that Aidan might no longer run the risk of crossing on foot rapid rivers and streams, Oswini prevailed on him to accept one of the best horses in the royal stables, richly caparisoned; but the bishop thus mounted felt ill at ease and soon found an opportunity to recover his peace of mind by ridding himself of such a costly piece of worldly goods. A beggar met him and asked an alms. Leaping down, Aidan at once delivered to him the horse and all its trappings, 'for he was very compassionate, a lover of the poor and a father to the wretched.' When news of this deed came to the king's ears he naturally felt rather hurt by what seemed a slight upon his bounty, and thus relieved his feelings when they were about to enter the hall together at dinner time:

'Had we not plenty less costly horses to give to the poor? Why, then, my lord bishop, didst thou want to give away the royal horse which it behoved thee to keep for thy own use, because I chose it expressly for thee?'

Promptly came the stern answer, such as Columkille might have uttered:

'Dost thou mean, sire, to say that yonder son of a mare is dearer to thee than yonder son of God?'

No more was said. They entered. The bishop, attended as usual by a priest, took his usual seat. The king, fresh from hunting, stood by the fire, warming himself among his retinue and musing the bishop's rebuke. Suddenly he ungirded his sword, gave it to a thane and hastened to throw himself at the bishop's feet, begging pardon. 'Never more will I say aught about this matter, nor find fault with thee for giving as much of our wealth as thou wilt to the sons of God.'

Deeply moved, 'almost dismayed, Aidan started up, raised his impulsive friend, and assured him of entire for-

givenness if he would but cheerfully begin the meal. Oswini gladly obeyed, but the other's turn had come to feel sad and his tears could not be restrained. The priest, also a Scot, using their native tongue so as not to be understood by their messmates, enquired the cause of his grief. 'I feel sure,' was the bishop's answer in the same language, 'that the king has not long to live; for never before have I seen a king so humble himself. My mind forebodes that sooner than we think he will be hurried out of this life. Such a ruler as he is too good for this folk.'

These words proved only too true. So covetous, according to one account, was Oswiu of his neighbour's kingdom that from the beginning of his reign he had been plotting against Oswini's life. His treachery had however been foiled, sometimes by the watchfulness of Oswini's subjects, sometimes by the honest scruples of his own instruments. In vain had Aidan tried to quench the fire of Oswiu's malice by the gentle rain of his exhortations. At last the Bernician king resolved to throw aside the subtlety of the serpent and put on the fierceness of the lion. According to another account, the seeds of discord between him and his rival had been sown by evilly disposed thanes. He may well have been jealous of Oswini's popularity, the more so the better that popularity was deserved: but disunion in presence of powerful foes was to both kingdoms so grave a source of weakness that Oswiu's was the policy of a real statesman. In the year 651 a Bernician host invaded Deira. Oswini led a much smaller force as far as a hill called Wilfaresdun, the modern Gariston, about twelve miles from Catterick, near the river Swale, whose clear waters had been used by Paulin as a baptismal font. There, having doubtless on the march solemnly and prayerfully weighed the issues at stake, he halted. He knew that the invader's quarrel was with him alone and that his enemy would not ravage land he wanted to rule. Why then waste the lives of subjects who were dear to him as his own soul?

Disregarding their earnest and passionate entreaties, he therefore disbanded his men and sent them all to their several homes. With one trusty thane named Tondhere he himself turned aside to Ingetlingum, the modern Gilling, near Richmond, where dwelt another thane named Hunwald, whom he had so enriched with bountiful gifts of land that he felt sure he could trust the man's faithfulness. Hunwald welcomed him with fair words, but had no sooner escorted him to his bedroom than he hastened to betray to Oswiu the hiding-place of his own king, benefactor and guest. Accordingly, on August 20, 651, in the eighth year of his reign, Oswini was foully murdered by a reeve of Oswiu named Ethelwin. He was buried in a stone cist at Tyne-mouth, beneath the floor of the chapel which had been built there in honour of the Virgin Mary. In course of time a party of Whitby nuns founded there a daughter house of that convent; but their successors were driven thence by Danish invaders. As in duty bound, Tondhere insisted on sharing the fate he could not avert from his master. During the remaining eighteen and a half years of his life Oswiu left no stone unturned to clear from his character the stain of this twofold crime.

Four years later, after his crowning victory at Winwidfield, in which Penda was routed and slain, the seventh Bretwalda granted at Gilling a site for a monastery, the fruit of his contrition. The grant was made at the instance of queen Eanfled, Oswini's second cousin, to another cousin, a monk named Trumhere, who, in the year 659, was promoted from his abbacy to be third bishop of the Mercians. In that monastery constant prayers were offered on behalf of both kings.

In succession to Oswini, not as king but as sub-king of Deira, or at least of Elmet, were chosen first Oswald's son Oidilwald, at the unripe age of fifteen; then, after Winwidfield, Oswiu's eldest son, Alhfrith. Both, to all appearance, treated their overlord so treacherously that he may well

have recognized in them the instruments of retributive justice. It seems probable that neither could withstand the resentment cherished by their subjects against the murderer of beloved Oswini. If so, each may have done his utmost to hold in check the revolt which he was reluctantly compelled to lead.

Only eleven days did Aidan survive his friend. Near Bamborough was a royal vill where he had a church and a bedroom, the headquarters of his preaching circuits. There he fell ill so suddenly that he could not be carried indoors but spent the last moments of his earthly pilgrimage beneath an awning stretched over him by his attendants on the bare ground, leaning against a buttress of solid oak. Thus simply, as befitted his simple life, did the Apostle of Northumbria enter on the last day of August into his well-earned rest. His body was buried in the cemetery of Lindisfarne and afterwards removed to a tomb, on the north side of the altar, in the cathedral built of timber by his successor Finan.

A year or two later Penda's host was, as usual, wasting that district with fire and sword. Among the buildings consumed was that church, all except that buttress, which stood unharmed among the leaping flames. It kept its place against the new church that was built on the site; and when that church was also burnt in a fire which arose by accident the hallowed buttress was again unharmed. For the third church there built it was consequently not used as an outside prop but placed within as an object of worship. Many who knelt before it were healed of their diseases; splinters cut from it and dropped into water gave the liquid healing virtue.

In the year 664 some of Aidan's bones travelled to Iona with Colman, the third bishop of Lindisfarne, and thence, in 668, to Inisboffin. The remainder found their final resting-place in the cathedral of Durham. There, in the fourteenth century, were reverently preserved his



skull set in copper, gilt and jewelled, and his cross of black jet.

On March 11, 1065, Oswini's stone cist was exhumed and opened by Egelwin, bishop of Durham. After the relics had been reverently washed, swathed in fresh wrappings and replaced, the cist was left in a prominent position on the floor of the chapel. To earl Tosti's wilful absence from the ceremony was attributed his banishment in that year and his death, in the following year, at the battle of Stamford Bridge. His devout wife, the countess Judith, begged and received a lock of the saint's hair. By Robert Mowbray, the first Norman earl of Northumberland, Oswini's relics were entrusted to the care of a party of Benedictine monks from St Alban's and transferred, on August 23, 1103, to the monastery he had lately built and endowed. Among the many witnesses of the ceremony were Ranulf, bishop of Durham, abbots Richard of St Alban's and Hugh of Salisbury. The holy king and martyr amply justified the honour paid him by signal deeds of power. Many a sufferer, by spending a night in faithful prayer at his shrine, won the boon of complete restoration to health.

In the year 1841, while the church of Collingham, near Wetherby, was being repaired, the shaft of a cross was discovered two feet below ground, bearing the runic inscription:

Aedilbraed this settae aeftaer ginifae  
ymb Auswini cyning  
gicegaed der saule.

In other words:

Athelbrad erected this in memory of her nephew,  
king Oswini.  
Pray for his soul.

Some antiquarians have therefore rashly ventured to differ from Camden by identifying Ingetlingum with Collingham rather than with Gilling; but their heresy violates more than one canon of orthodox etymology.

## CHAPTER XII

## FURSEY AND FELIX, APOSTLES OF EAST ANGLIA

Your young men shall see visions. Joel ii, 28.

Happy is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the highways (to Zion). Ps. lxxxiv, 5.

**F**URSEY was born in South Munster, late in the sixth century. His father, Fintan, and grandfather, Finlog, were chieftains of their tribe. His mother, Gelgah, was the daughter of a Connaught chieftain named Aedh Finn. He was put to school at the monastery of Inchiquin on Lough Corrib, then ruled by abbot Medan. After he had finished his course there he built a monastery at Rathmat, on the eastern shore of the Lough. Killursa, meaning Cell of Fursey, is the present name of the place; and it may be his own church which now lies there in ruins. While from all sides devout men were streaming thither he felt affectionately eager for some of his kinsfolk to join the new brotherhood. With this object in view, he visited the neighbourhood of his home and eloquently sowed there the good seed of Truth. While he was preaching he fell so seriously ill that, yielding to advice, he sought, under his father's roof, such nursing as a mother rejoices to give. Though it was not far from his lodging, he needed the support of a strong arm in walking slowly thither. As they went through gathering dusk he began prayerfully to chant the evening psalms. Suddenly darkness closed round him and his feet gave way. He was carried into the nearest hovel, to all appearance dead, but in fact so entranced as to enjoy the first of those medieval visions of the awful Beyond which faintly foreshadowed the *Divina Commedia* of Dante.

From above four hands were stretched downwards to grasp and lift him. As he rose he beheld, above the hands, outspread wings of snowy sheen and was dazzled by such effulgent radiance as proceeds from angels. Then, in front, he espied a third angel, equally bright, equipped with a gleaming white shield and flashing sword. Wondrously soothed was his soul by the rustling murmur of their wings and the cooing melody of their voices as they sang:

From strength to strength go the saints;  
unto God in Sion each of them appeareth.

Ps. lxxxiv, 7.

He heard also a joyous strain of many thousand angels but could hardly distinguish more than the few words: 'To meet Christ they have gone forth.' Then one of the countless heavenly choir bade the leading angel of the three replace the soaring soul in his prison-house of flesh. As the other two obediently bore him downward, Fursey became aware that he was disembodied and enquired whither they were taking him. From the companion on his right came the answer: 'Duty bids thee resume thy own body till thou hast borne thy allotted burden of care.'

Loathing the prospect, he exclaimed: 'From you three I am unwilling to be parted!'

'When that burden,' was the reply, 'has been fully borne, we shall return to bear thee aloft.'

Once more stole gently into his consciousness the soothing refrain: 'Unto God in Sion each of them appeareth.'

Then, without knowing how it happened, soul and body were again united. Instead of celestial music he heard the crowing of cocks and the voices of wondering mourners, who had been watching all night his lifeless body. A slight movement of his limbs beneath the bedclothes encouraged them to uncover his face. The ashen pallor had departed and the rosy hue of health returned. Their answers to his questions puzzled him. He sat up, turning over in his mind

the strange words of the angels, and felt sorry there was at his bedside none wise enough to explain the mysterious vision. Then he asked for and received the holy housel but felt too weak to stand.

All that day and the next his condition was normal and many neighbours were visiting him. Then, at midnight, again came rushing darkness; his feet grew cold and stiff; with hands outstretched in prayer, remembering the joyous vision of which those had been the signs, he prepared to welcome the reality of death. As he fell back on his bed, again entranced, he heard horrible voices of a shouting throng, who tried to drive him out of his body. Opening his eyes, he saw naught but the three angels of the former vision, one on either hand, the armed leader standing near his head. Deprived of bodily sight and speech, he not only saw them, but was, as before, ineffably soothed by their sweet chanting. From the angel on his right hand came then this word of comfort: 'Fear not, we shall protect thee.' As they raised him he passed through deafening yells of demons and heard one of them say: 'Let us go in front and meet him with warfare!'

Then he saw on his left a black cloud rolling up before his face a battle array. With the eye of his soul he dimly discerned hideous and monstrous forms, shrunken and scraggy, with craning necks and swollen, kettleshaped heads. Whether they flew or fought, their aspect appalled him. Yet, as glaring light had hidden from him the angels' faces, so horrifying darkness hid theirs.

On Fursey and his protectors rained a shower of fiery shafts which the shield of the third angel caught and quenched. Before his gaze, as he fought, fell the ugly foes. Thus did he deign to reason with them:

'Bar not our way, for in your perdition this man has no share.'

Quoting Scripture, a blasphemous demon retorted:

‘Unjust is God if he damns not that man, for Worthy of death are not only evil doers but their abettors (Romans i, 32).’

While the angel fought, Fursey supposed that the whole earth was being disturbed by the uproarious din. Then, like a bruised serpent, Satan lifted up his poisonous head and spoke:

‘Idle has often been his talk; he ought not therefore to enjoy, scatheless, a life of bliss.’

A. ‘Unless thou canst lay to his charge grave offences on account of slight ones he will not perish.’

S. ‘If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive yours (Matt. vi, 15).’

A. ‘When did he avenge himself? or whom hath he wronged?’

S. ‘It is not written, If ye avenge not, but If ye forgive not from your heart (Matt. xviii, 35).’

A. ‘He had in his heart true tenderness of feeling, but, in the usual way of men, kept it to himself.’

S. ‘As he received injury in the usual way, so will he receive punishment from the Supreme Judge.’

A. ‘Before the Lord judges him, we shall.’

S. ‘If God be just that man will not enter into the kingdom of heaven, for he has not fulfilled the saying, Except ye turn and become as little children, ye will in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.’

A. ‘Before the Lord judges him, we shall.’

Thus did the armed angel vanquish the host of the guileful Adversary.

In obedience to his right-hand protector Fursey then looked back, and saw, far below, a dark valley. In its atmosphere were burning, apart one from another, four fires.

A. ‘What are yonder fires?’

F. ‘I cannot guess!’

A. ‘After all sins have in baptism been put away from those who confess and renounce, these four fires burn up the world. Into the first, the Fire of Falsehood, are cast those

who break their promise to renounce Satan and all his works. In the second, the Fire of Greed, are consumed those who prefer worldly wealth to the prospect of heaven. The third, the Fire of Strife, roars round those who, even in trifling matters, shrink not from vexing their neighbours. The fourth, the Fire of Ruthlessness, is fed by the wicked wretches who think nothing of robbing and cheating feeble folk.'

As the angel was speaking the fires spread, united and came alarmingly close to Fursey, who was thus reassured:

A. 'What thou hast not kindled will not burn within thee; for though it be terrible and mighty, yonder fire tries each man according to his works. In it will burn every man's lust. Just as unlawful self-indulgence consumes the body, so does due punishment burn the soul.'

Then Fursey saw the angel in front so divide the fiery flame that it rose like a wall on either side, beyond the two flanking angels, who shielded him from the fierce heat.

Winging their way through the fire and piling up dread warfare in its midst Fursey saw four unclean demons, one of whom spoke thus for his master and was thus answered by the right-hand angel:

D. 'The servant that knoweth his Lord's will and doeth it not shall be beaten, as he deserves, with many stripes (Luke xii, 47).'

A. 'How, pray, hath he not fulfilled his Lord's will?'

D. 'He hath received the gifts of unrighteous men.'

A. 'In the belief that every one of them had repented.'

D. 'He ought first to have made sure that the repentance was genuine. Gifts blind the eyes of the wise and pervert the words of the righteous (Exod. xxiii, 8; Ecclus. xx, 29).'

A. 'Before the Lord judges him, we shall.'

D. 'Hitherto we have supposed that God is truthful.'

A. 'What else, pray, is He?'

D. 'He promised that every sin which is not purged away on earth will surely be punished in heaven. The prophet

Isaiah cries (i, 19), If ye be willing and obedient, ye will eat the good of the land; but if ye be unwilling and provoke me to wrath, the sword will devour you. That man did not purge away his sins on earth and is not being punished here. Where then is God's justice ?'

A. 'Cease thy blasphemy, for thou knowest not the hidden dooms of God.'

D. 'What meanest thou ?'

A. 'As long as there is hope of repentance, God's mercy is man's comrade.'

D. 'Yet here is no room for repentance.'

A. 'Too deep for thee to fathom are the mysteries of God; even here, perchance, there will be room.'

D. 'If justice be so unprincipled, let us depart !'

The heckling was then continued by another of the fell rout, who thus began:

'The narrow gate remaineth, through which but few enter, Thou shalt love thy neighbour even as thyself (Matt. xxii, 39). There we shall be too strong for him !'

A. 'Yonder man hath done good to his neighbours.'

D. 'Doing good is not enough, unless he hath also loved his neighbour even as himself.'

A. 'Doing good is the fruit of love.'

D. 'But because he hath not by loving fulfilled God's word, damnation ought to be his fate.'

Seeing his minions vanquished, Satan himself returned to the charge:

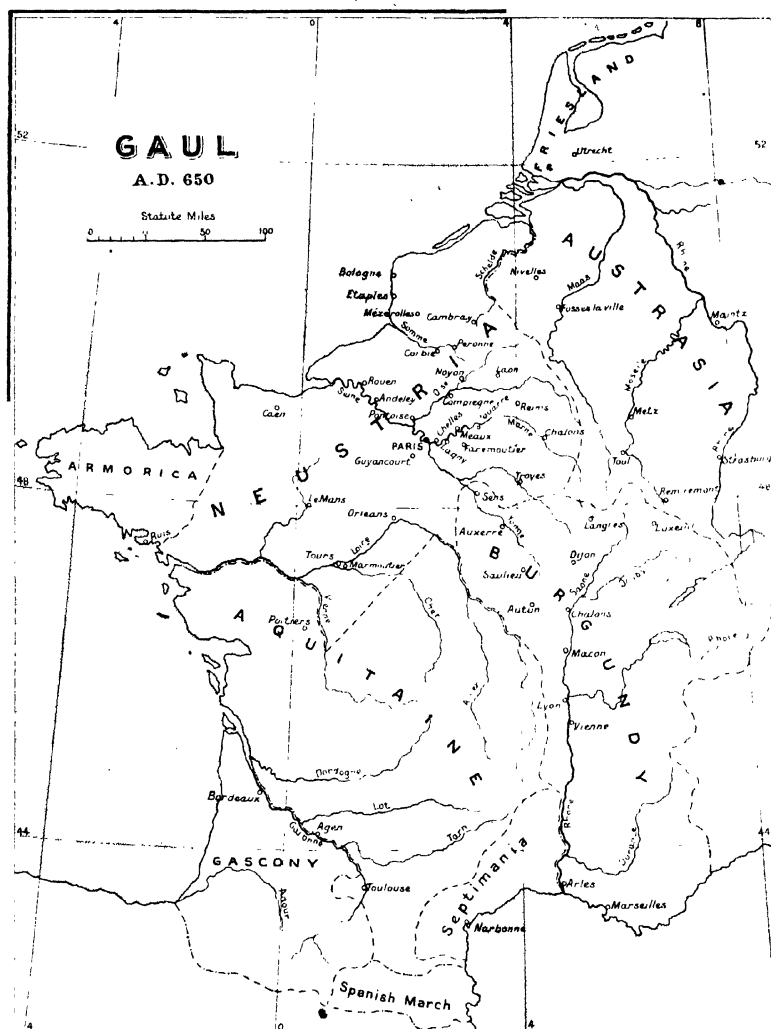
'If God be not unjust, and if liars and transgressors displease him, that man will not go scot free. For he promised to renounce the world and on the contrary hath loved it, in defiance of the apostolic precept, Love not the world, neither the things that are therein (1 John ii, 15). That man, therefore, hath been restrained neither by his own plighted word nor by the apostle's warning.'

A. 'Not for himself did he love worldly goods, but for all the needy on whom he dutifully bestowed them.'

S. 'In whatsoever way the world is loved, such love is







contrary to the commandment of God and the solemn promise of Christian baptism.'

Yet once more, with a parting shot, man's envious adversary tried to pierce the angel's impenetrable armour.

S. 'It is written, If thou warnest not the wicked from his wicked way, his blood shall I require at thy hand (Ezek. iii, 18). That man did not warn sinners to repent.'

A. 'No; for of such an occasion it is written, He that is prudent will keep silence; for it is an evil time (Amos, v, 18). When the hearers despise the word, the tongue even of the teacher is tied.'

S. 'Yet he ought to warn till the hour of death, neither agreeing nor holding his tongue.'

Thus hotly fought the demons with weapons of controversy till the Lord gave an umpire's decision in favour of the angels. Then round Furseay poured unspeakably bright glory and music of angelic choirs. No toil, they sang, should seem too hard, no time too long for winning the joy of eternal triumph. Then, gazing upward, he saw, spreading far and wide in front, bright hosts of angels and holy men, with flashing wings; before whose onset vanished the confused fires and the frightful demons. Among the holy men he espied two famous Munster bishops, Bean and his former abbot, Medan. They came near him, told him their names and talked affably. Their days in the Kalendar are December 16 and November 14.

While all around him was perfectly serene, Furseay beheld four full choirs of angels and heard them sing the Trisagion. As the music closed about him, filling with joy his enraptured soul, the angel on his right said:

'Thus they exult in the High Assembly whence we come. Our ministry to mankind often makes us deaf to those gladdening strains; and by corrupting human hearts demons bring to naught our toilsome work.'

Then, glowing with angelic beauty, those two bishops

approached and told Fursey it was time for him to return to the world. Noticing his dismay, 'What fearest thou?' said Bean; 'the toil that lies before thee is but a day's journey. Warn all to whom thou preachest that their doom is nigh. By two kinds of famine, however, mankind must first be distressed, both springing from the same root of bitterness. The one is the famine of the miser in the midst of his hoard; the other of the man who is filled with knowledge of God's word, but, through lack of love, misses the joy of doing God's will. The chief objects of God's wrath are Teachers and Rulers who stop halfway: some generous but lustful, others chaste but covetous: some gentle in manner but spiteful at heart; others quick to forget and forgive but quicker in anger and quarrel. Some boast of God's gifts as their own gains. Many abstain from food which God created to be thankfully taken, but by indulging in pride, avarice, envy and slander, devour as it were their neighbour's flesh and blood. Such sins are more hateful to God than gluttony and fornication. The source and root of all ills is the pride which sets people against king, clergy against bishop, monks against abbot, sons against father. With every one that will not learn humble obedience to his ruler God will deal so justly that, when his turn comes to rule, none will obey him. Be thou therefore a faithful steward, claiming for thyself naught but victuals and raiment. By treating every gift as an opportunity of giving and bestowing alms on the poor without waiting to be asked, thou wilt open the mouth of the dumb. Withdraw not thyself wholly from affairs of state, but let thy attention to them be for the sake not of gain but of souls. If any man bestow on thee a gift early in the morning and before evening ask thee to give it back to him, then, as thou didst gladly receive, so gaily restore. If towards all who gainsay or withstand thee thou presentest an unruffled calmness of soul, thou wilt be able to turn to gentleness the fierceness even of wild beasts. To the princes of Erin be this thy mes-

sage from God, that they abandon all iniquity and win by penitence the weal of their souls: to the bishops of Holy Church, that by loving the world more than God they make Him jealous, and that death-bed repentance cometh too late.'

The speaker became silent; the angelic host returned to heaven; Fursey found himself alone with his triple escort on his way back to earth; on either side rose as before the alarming fire. Out of the left-hand fire a man was hurled on to him by the demons; their jaws collided; Fursey's jaw and shoulders were scorched; the angel on the right threw his assailant back into the fire, while the angel on the left shielded him from the fire itself. Fursey recognized the hapless wretch as one who, in the hour of death, had given him his own garment. Satan, ever watchful, delivered his seventh and last assault:

'Drive not away thy old friend! As thou didst take his gift, it behoves thee to share his pains.'

A. 'Not greedily, but to win freedom for the man's soul, he took the gift.'

The fire passed beyond Fursey's ken.

A. 'What thou didst kindle hath burnt in thee. For if thou hadst not taken that man's raiment, who died in the sins he had committed, his pains would not have been burning thy body. Declare therefore to all the need of repentance, and bid priests urge it on a sinner even to the last hour; but forbid them to take any of his goods or to bury him, if he die unrepentant, in holy ground.'

While he was being thus exhorted Fursey seemed to himself to be standing on the roof of the church between the angels, inspecting his body but seeing neither the walls of his room nor the crowd of mourners, not even his clothes. When the talking angel bade him recognize and resume his body he shrank from it as from a strange corpse. Thus was he reassured:

A. 'Fear not to take thy body, for it will no longer disgust thee by its moral weakness. In this tribulation thou hast so subdued forbidden lusts that henceforward they will not prevail against thee.'

As the body opened to receive its master, the angel continued:

A. 'Let thy reviving body be sprinkled with fresh water. All thy way of life, even to the end, we shall watch, and, if thou doest well, we shall share with thee our joy.'

After waking from his deathlike trance, Fursey related his weird adventure to the bystanders, clergy as well as kinsfolk and neighbours, and assured them of the rich reward that awaits all who arrive at the abodes of bliss. Strangely enough, as soon as it had been sprinkled, his flesh showed scars where his astral body had felt the scorching. Till the day of his death they were visible to all.

Feeling better equipped than ever for spiritual work, Fursey resumed his preaching. Only to those who asked, not in mere curiosity, but with a genuine desire to deepen and strengthen their own contrition, did he relate the wonders he had seen and heard. On the first anniversary of his vision he remembered the phrase, 'A day's journey,' and dared to hope it was ended; but, as he lay again entranced, the angel appeared to him and explained that it meant twelve years. Ten years later, feeling dismayed by disastrous tribal warfare in his own province, and becoming aware that the minds of some less popular preachers were feeling the prick of envy, he left all and retired, with a few chosen brethren, to a small island. Thence, not long afterwards, they made their way to East Anglia and were welcomed with due honour by king Sigebert the Learned. Among them were Fursey's own brothers, Foillan and Ultan. Gobban and Dicul were the names of two others. They were both priests; Foillan was a bishop.

Sigebert had in his youth fled into Gaul from the enmity

of his stepfather, Radwald, who probably feared his rivalry. There, after being converted and baptized, he became, so we are assured by Beda, a thoroughly Christian and very learned man. Both Christianity and learning were at such a low ebb everywhere else that Luxeuil may well have been the monastic school in which he was trained; and the more probably, because he was followed to East Anglia by a native of Burgundy named Felix. Sigeberht found himself on his return, in the year 631, confronted with the formidable task of restoring the faith among his folk, who had relapsed into heathenism after the murder, three years earlier, of his half-brother Eorpwald. Felix went first to Kent, stayed there long enough to learn the local organization of schools, and was then by archbishop Honorius consecrated missionary bishop of East Anglia. Domnoc was assigned him for his see, and the ruins of the Roman Sitemagus were the quarry from which he took building materials. Both places now lie twenty fathoms deep off the coast of Suffolk at Dunwich.

The first step taken by the wise king and bishop was to found such a school for boys as might rival the best in Gaul. Masters and teachers, doubtless also Burgundian, were provided by Felix. It seems reasonable to believe that not only those two leaders but also their assistants brought direct from Luxeuil, where they had been fellow students under abbots Eustace and Waldebert, the uplifting tradition of Columban. Their loving and reverent cultivation of the previously barren spiritual soil bore, so Beda assures us, abundant fruit. Felix justified his name by setting free the whole of his flock from the haplessness of iniquity and leading them into the abiding happy state of men whose faith bears the fruit of good works.

The year of Fursey's arrival in East Anglia was probably 637. The motive of his choice can only be guessed. Perhaps Sigeberht and Felix, hearing of his fame, had sent him a pressing invitation; perhaps the fame of Columban

had led Furseý to seek, of his own accord, fellowship with spiritual offspring of that great pioneer. At Burghcastle, then called Cnobheres Burh, near the spot where, about twenty miles north of Dunwich, the river Waveney flows into Bure Water, Sigeberht gave his welcome guest the remains of a Roman fortress, whose massive walls, fourteen feet high, and solid circular towers, fourteen feet in diameter, still bear witness, no less eloquently than Pevensey and Richborough, to the majesty of imperial Rome. There Furseý and his comrades soon built their church and huts.

As the twelve years named by the angel were then drawing to a close, Furseý was eagerly looking forward to his release. On the anniversary he fell ill and again, in a trance, saw and heard the angel, who had much to say about the urgent need of his preaching but nothing about the event for which he longed. On the third night came the final admonition: 'Watch ye and pray, for ye know not the day nor the hour.' Furseý then understood that there was more work for him to do and proceeded to enlarge his new monastery. There, not long afterwards, in midwinter, while ice covered river and lake, one of the new chums Furseý had gathered round him watched his thinly clad master sweat as profusely as in midsummer at the distant memory of the startling visions he was then relating.

In course of time Sigeberht abdicated in favour of his kinsman Ecgric, whose fitness he had tested by entrusting to him beforehand part of the kingdom, possibly the northern half, our Norfolk. He was then tonsured and, in a cell he had built for himself, strove to win the higher spiritual kingship. The place owes its present name, Bury St Edmunds, to his more famous, but less fameworthy, successor. In those days, when fighting and feasting seemed to most men of high rank the chief ends of life, such an example was probably so salutary that he ought not to be condemned for shirking his duty. His new tasks may have

been more congenial than his old; but the forming of monastic habits was doubtless a real warfare. His example was afterwards followed by Sebbi of Essex, Ethelred of Mercia and Ceolwulf of Northumbria.

The younger of Fursey's two brothers, Ultan, after long probation in the monastery, sought higher perfection by becoming an anchorite, thus possibly showing the way to Sigebert; but the sequence of these events is uncertain. Soon afterwards Fursey himself resigned his abbacy to Foillan, the elder, and joined Ultan. They spent a year together, dividing their time between manual toil, prayer and meditation. Then, in obedience to an urgent summons, Fursey attended a witenagemot in order to give king and nobles the benefit of his lofty wisdom in a critical state of affairs, probably the threatening attitude of Penda. The storm-cloud of invasion soon broke. The ealdormen of East Anglia, seeing that their own levies were no match for their hardy and reckless foes, asked Sigebert to strengthen their ranks by his presence. When he met with an obstinate refusal all their arguments and entreaties, they dragged him, willy nilly, out of his bare cell and placed him in the fighting line, hoping that the presence of one who had formerly been the most strenuous and skilful of leaders would revive the courage of cowardly ceorls. Mindful however of his peaceful profession, Sigebert would hold in his hand nothing but a wand, and watched without flinching the excellent Mercian army close round the flanks of his own. Both he and Ecgric were slain; the survivors of the defeat were scattered by the victorious pursuers, who sooner or later returned by the way they had come, over the ancient rampart known as the Devil's Dyke, after doing, as their hapless victims would feel, the Devil's work.

Fursey's nature seems to have been far too tenderly sensitive to bear the brunt of such a disaster, similar to the one which had driven him from the land of his birth. Perhaps also his intercourse with Felix had aroused in him so strong



a desire to work among the Franks that only a slight impulse was needed to set him again in motion. After passing up the valley of the Somme through Mézerolles, Authiale and Grandcourt, he was heartily welcomed at Péronne by Erkenwald, the actual ruler of Neustria, who had been, in the year 641, elected Mayor of the Palace, the age of King Clovis II being then only eight. As that boy is said to have also welcomed Fursey, the event can hardly be assigned to an earlier year than 644. If in that or the preceding year happened the conquest of East Anglia by Penda, we may infer that, as we might have expected, his irresistible onset was due to the defeat and death of Oswald at Maserfeld in 642. Anna, the new Christian king of East Anglia, doubtless acknowledged the overlordship of Penda, but was nevertheless bold and generous enough to shelter the heathen Cenwealh of Wessex. That impulsive son of Cynegils and brother-in-law of Penda had, for the offence of putting away his wife, been deservedly driven from his realm by her wrathful brother. By assigning that event to the year 645 the Chronicler seems to confirm the dates here assigned to Anna's election and Fursey's arrival at Péronne.

At Lagny on the Marne, about twenty miles east of Paris, he and his companions found an ideal site for a monastery, beautifully set like a gem between river and forest, with pleasant pastures on one side and fruitful vineyards on the other. There, with Erkenwald's permission, they built their church and cells; thither, by the usual trade route, soon came from Munster many of their kith and kin.

The household of Erkenwald was ruled by a young, beautiful and capable English slave-girl, Baldhildis or Bathildis; both names are given her in the records. The former means a bold, the latter a useful heroine. She was certainly no less useful than bold. The whisper passed current that her father was Eadbald, king of Kent. Closely treading in the footsteps of Christ, she humbled herself

before her elder servants, mending their clothes, bringing them water to wash, removing from their feet and cleaning their shoes. When Erkenwald pressed her to become his second wife she hid herself in a corner under a heap of filthy rags, though she can hardly have guessed the higher destiny that awaited her and also bears lasting witness to his magnanimity. Her marriage to young Clovis soon gave Neustria a most noble queen. Her beneficent activity probably owed much to the influence of Fursey, though he died too soon to guide it far. Her short-lived husband was the first of the fainéant or feckless Merwings. She was, we are told, duly submissive to him, but pleaded with him the cause of the poor and of churches. By constant prayer, as well as by consistent example, she did her utmost to bring the power of Christ into the lives of all with whom she had to do.

Hardly five years had passed since the founding of Lagny when Fursey visited the valley of the Somme, fell ill at Mézerolles and there, on January 16, ended his long 'day's journey.' His body was conveyed to Péronne. It so happened that a magnificent new church built there by Erkenwald on Mont Cignes was then waiting to be dedicated. Thirty days later, after the solemn dedication of the church to the twelve apostles, the precious relic was reverently entombed in the place of honour near the high altar. After it had lain there four years bishops Eligius of Noyon and Fladobert of Cambray transferred it to a shrine which had been made for it eastward of the altar. In course of time the church came to be called St Fursey's, and a monastery of Scots, probably Munstermen, clustered round it. One of them, named Cellan, wrote a letter to Aldhelm, asking for a copy of his works. Even the citadel of the town became known as Perrona Scottorum. The monasteries both of Lagny and Péronne were destroyed by Normans in the ninth century, and their records perished with them.

Felix died on March 8, 647, a year or two before Fursey, after seventeen years of strenuous work. As there is no

further record of his school, we cannot feel sure that it survived him. His monastery at Seham and his church at Redham were destroyed by Danish invaders. In the time of Cnut his relics were removed to Ramsey. From him are named Felixstowe and the Flixtons; also, strangely enough, Feliskirk, a village near Thirsk. The old minster of South Elmham, near Bungay, in Suffolk, was probably built and used by him. His deacon Thomas, a native of the Fenland, succeeded him and thus became the second English bishop consecrated by Honorius.

Fursey had not long departed this life when Foillan and his family of brethren, shunning the fury of the heathen Mercians, fled over sea from Cnobheresburh. They took with them nothing but their altar plate and books. Like Fursey they were hospitably welcomed at Péronne by Erkenwald, but after a while incurred his displeasure and were driven away. They then travelled northward into Brabant and were kindly received, at the large double monastery of Nivelles, by its abbess Gertrudis and her mother Itta, the widow of the first Pippin, who had shed around him the fragrance, rare in those days among statesmen, of a righteous and blameless life. Their son Grimwald became, like his father, the Austrasian Mayor of the Palace; the elder of their two daughters, Begga, was the mother of the second Pippin. Gertrudis was a mere girl when she astonished her parents by declaring that she would be the bride of none but her Lord Jesus Christ. Fourteen years later, in 639, her father died and her mother founded that monastery. Both were veiled by bishop Amand of Utrecht, and Itta chose to be a simple nun under the rule of her daughter, in whose mental and spiritual power, as well as in her beauty of person and character, she doubtless felt a mother's joyous pride. Envoys of the abbess went to Rome in search of relics and books. For teachers learned enough in the oracles of God to guide the studies in which she and her family delighted, Gertrudis sent other envoys, not to

Rome, but 'oversea,' that is, presumably, to East Anglia, possibly also to Kent and Southern Ireland. The best men trained by Felix may have gladly taken refuge from political disorder among so many eager learners. Such an exportation of Christian teachers from East Anglia explains the fact that none, so far as we know, went from that kingdom into other parts of England. Even Essex had to be reclaimed from heathenism, first by Northumbrian Cedd, then by Mercian Jaruman. The third bishop, moreover, of Dunwich was fetched from Kent. His name was Berhtgils; but when he succeeded Thomas, in the year 652, he took the name Boniface.

In the same year, on the anniversary of Fursey's death, Foillan's murdered body was borne into Nivelles on the shoulders of Dido, bishop of Poitiers, and of Grimwald, who had joined in welcoming him thither. Thence the body was removed to the monastery which Foillan had founded at Fosses-la-Ville. Ultan succeeded him there as abbot and, while Gertrudis lay on her death-bed, truly foretold to her messenger on March 17, 658, that she would be released on the following day at the hour of mass. In course of time he became abbot of Péronne and died there on May 1 in or about the year 680.

The beneficent widowhood of Bathildis, which began in the year 655, had then long been closed by her death. During the boyhood of Chlotchar, the eldest of her three sons, she acted as his nominal regent, but the substance of power was firmly grasped by Ebrouin, her ambitious and unscrupulous Mayor of the Palace. Eligius, bishop of Noyon and Audoen, archbishop of Rouen, had her vigorous aid in their efforts to uproot the widespread weed called simony. At Corbie, on the Somme, a few miles above Amiens, she built and endowed, in honour of the apostles Peter and Paul and of the protomartyr Stephen, a monastery which was occupied by a party of picked monks from Luxeuil and became an important centre of piety and

learning. At Chelles, about ten miles west of Lagny, on the opposite side of the Marne, she enlarged and enriched the Parthenon, or convent of nuns, which had been founded and dedicated to St George by queen Clothildis; such, at least, was the somewhat vague tradition of the place. Thither, about the year 664, she retired and lived in deep humility, as a simple nun, under the rule of abbess Bertild, whom, together with other nuns, she had herself brought thither from Jouarre. In earlier years, during her frequent visits, she used to serve in the kitchen and clear away offal. That happy family, we are assured, had but one mind and one heart, so tenderly in Christ did they all love one another. Many other homes of religion, including Luxeuil and Faremoutier, were enriched by the bounty of queen Bathildis. Among them was also the convent founded by Clothildis, in honour of the Virgin Mary, at Andeley-sur-Seine. As early as the year 640, according to Beda, English parents began to send their daughters to be wedded to the heavenly Bridegroom in the convents of Gaul, especially Faremoutier, Chelles and Andeley. It can hardly be doubted that the fame of Bathildis partly determined their choice; nor that the English abbesses of Faremoutier often sought and followed her wise counsel.

There is also on record a tradition that English kings sent envoys to Chelles, in search of teachers who would found and govern monastic schools in England. When, for instance, bishop Erkenwald invited Hildelith to Barking, he was perhaps obeying the order of King Wulfhere. Among the English nuns of Chelles were Hereswith and Mildred. Botulf and his brother Adulf may perhaps be reckoned among the English monks.

When the day of her departure drew nigh Bathildis dreamt that a ladder reaching to heaven stood in front of the altar she had dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and that an escort of angels was waiting to help her climb. Dreading to leave behind her an infant goddaughter named Rade-

gund, she prayed that the child might pass before her through the gate of death. As soon as her prayer had been granted, her own soul winged its upward flight, on January 26, in or about the year 670. Many cures are said to have been wrought at her tomb.

One of Beda's longest chapters describes another vision of woe and weal beyond the grave. The seer Drythelm was the pious head of a pious family in the district of Ayrshire called Cunningham. In the year 693 a serious illness prostrated him and was ended, to all appearance, by his death at nightfall; but, at the first streak of dawn, he revived and sat up so suddenly as to scare away all the mourners but his wife. Forthwith he rose, went straight to church and prayed till the sun was high; then divided his worldly goods equally between her, their sons and the poor. Soon afterwards he tramped to Melrose, received the monastic tonsure and entered the hermitage which abbot Athelwald had provided for him. There till death he abode, in such deep contrition of mind and body as declared, more eloquently than words, how awe-inspiring had been his brief glimpse.

Like Fursey he saw fires and demons, but instead of three angels had one shining guide. Unlike Fursey he found, awaiting those who postpone repentance till their last hour, a purgatory in which their stay might be shortened by the prayers, alms, fasts and masses of the living. Like Fursey, again, he remembered his reluctance to resume his body and told his tale, not to idle enquirers, but only to such as were eager to confirm either their fear or their hope. Among his most frequent listeners were king Aldfrith and a tonsured priest named Hamgils who retold the tale to Beda.

## CHAPTER XIII

## CUTHBERT AWAITING HIS CALL

When I was a child I spake as a child, I felt as a child,  
I thought as a child. 1 Cor. xiii, 11.

**O**F his birth and parentage there is no trustworthy record, but only a legendary account, full of marvels and anachronisms, yet possibly based on such a solid substratum of truth as to deserve partial and provisional acceptance. His mother is there described as the daughter of a Leinster chieftain, taken prisoner in an inter-tribal brawl by his father, a chieftain of Connaught. His birthplace is said to have been a convent at Headfort or Kells in Westmeath; the place of his baptism, Ardbraccan in Meath; his baptismal name Nulluhoc, which means nothing better than a squalling brat. After the death of the bishop who adopted and baptized him mother and child crossed to Britain and landed at Portpatrick in the Rinns of Galloway.

Of his infancy in Ireland we have this pleasant glimpse. Round his neck he used to wear a bronze bell called kelim. By some mishap it broke, to his intense grief. Alone he carried it to the nearest craftsman. Between them ensued the following dialogue:

‘ For the love of God, please mend my broken toy ! ’

‘ Gladly, for God’s sake, would I, but have no skill in metal casting.’

‘ If thou art really willing, for the love of God, to please me, I feel sure thou wilt not fail for lack of skill.’

‘ He whose wisdom moulded the heavens can indeed give me skill enough; but however willing I be, smithcraft needs glowing faggots, and the nearest oakgrove is very far away.’

‘ I will go, in God’s name, and fetch fuel enough.’

The toddling mite then took a reaper's basket into a field, filled it with green twigs and brought it to his good-humoured friend. Touched by the child's simple faith, he piled up the twigs and set them ablaze. To his surprise there was heat enough to melt the bronze and recast the kelim.

The legend gives Nulluhoc and his mother a somewhat perilous journey from their landing-place to Lothian, where they found her brothers, bishops both. Having entrusted her son to them, she set her face Romeward as a penitent pilgrim.

From the earliest authentic account of his life, written soon after his death, we learn that, at the age of eight, Cuthbert was the foster-son of a widow named Kenswith, whose home was the village Wrangholm in Lothian. There is in Berwickshire, between Leader Water and Soutra Hill, a parish now called Channelkirk, where a church erected in the boy's honour was formerly called Childenechirche or Chingelkirk, whence the rime:

Ginglekirk bell  
Which rings now  
And evermore shall.

On English soil he very properly received a purely English name, so remarkably prophetic of high destiny that it may well be due to the impression he made on his new neighbours. The first syllable Cuth (pronounced cooth) means known or famous, the second beorht means bright or illustrious. Being extremely nimble, in mind as well as body, he was cock of the walk among his playmates. At leaping, running and wrestling he was more than a match even for older boys. Often, when the others had flung themselves on the ground tired out, he remained proudly erect, challenging them to another game. One day, while he was the moving spirit of mischief in an unclad crowd, some of whom were standing on their heads and turning



somersaults, others twisting their limbs into whimsical contortions, his first call to higher aims came from a bright-eyed cherub only three years old, who began to be constantly bidding him be more steady. As Cuthbert paid no heed, his remonstrances were enforced by floods of tears. At last, when his playfellows begged him to tell them what ailed him, between his sobs he blurted out the startling premonition:

‘ Dear Cuthbert, holy priest and bishop, this foolish and unseemly trifling is utterly unworthy of thy high calling ! ’

No less sobered than surprised, the object of that strange rebuke began from that moment, more than ever before, to set Godward the current of his thoughts. Many years later Cuthbert himself told the story to Trumwine, who was consecrated in 681 bishop of Abercorn.

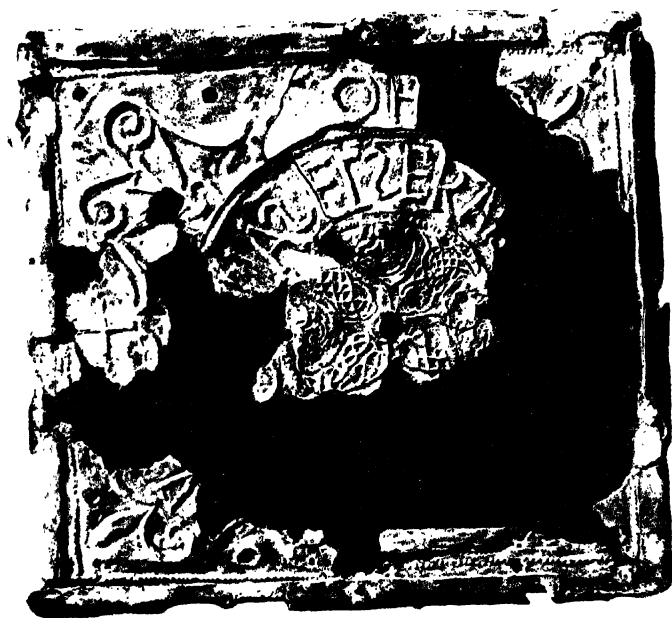
While still a boy Cuthbert was lamed by a swollen knee and such a contraction of sinews that the foot was held up off the ground. Being therefore unable to walk, he was one day lying out of doors in the sunshine, propped up against a wall, on the spot whither he had been carried by servants, when he saw approaching a stranger of noble mien, clad in white raiment and mounted on a horse of surpassing beauty. To his courteous greeting and smiling inquiry whether such a guest as he could be entertained, Cuthbert gave this answer:

‘ If God had so willed and had not, as the due of my sins, bound me fast with these disabling knots, I should have been eager to play the host.’

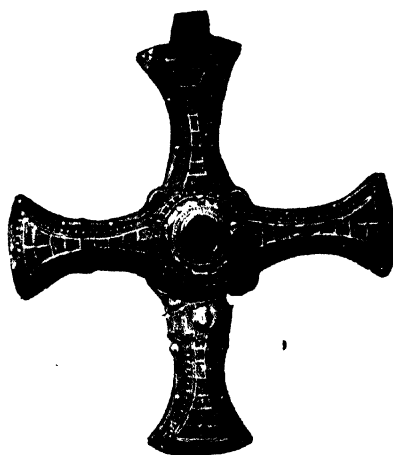
The stranger then dismounted, examined the damaged knee, which had baffled the local leeches, and thus prescribed:

‘ Apply hot a poultrice of meal and milk ! ’

He then remounted and rode away. Obedience to that simple prescription so soon cured Cuthbert of his lameness



ST. CUTHBERT'S PORTABLE ALTAR



ST. CUTHBERT'S PECTORAL CROSS



that he felt sure he had been visited, like blind Tobit, by an angel.

Some years later he had, one winter day, forded the Wear at Lumley Castle, travelling northward. The few 'sheals' of swineherds he found were then empty, being, on account of floods, habitable only in spring and summer. Seeking in one of them shelter from a storm he tethered his tired horse to a wall and knelt down to pray. The animal raised its head and greedily tore down with its teeth a bundle of thatch, to allay the pangs of hunger. Through the hole thus made fell half a loaf and a piece of meat, wrapped in a napkin. Having given thanks and shared with his trusty comrade this lucky meal, Cuthbert resumed his journey, gladdened by such a convincing proof that, come weal come woe, he could never fall out of the watchful keeping of his Maker.

He next learnt that the ear of Him who maketh the winds His messengers and heareth the cry of the poor was also open to his earnest prayers on behalf of men in distress. On the south bank of the estuary of the Lothian Tyne stood the monastery of Tiningham. One day a party of monks had been bringing down stream, on five rafts, a load of timber for the use of the brethren and were trying to beach them at the usual landing stage, when a squall of wind seized the rafts and bore them swiftly seaward. The other brethren promptly launched boats, but for these both wind and tide proved too strong. They therefore betook themselves to supplication, kneeling on a rocky eminence; but that day the availing prayer was not theirs. On the opposite north bank stood Cuthbert, amid a crowd of rude peasants. When the rafts had been carried so far out to sea that they looked no bigger than gulls breasting the waves, these onlookers began to jeer and scoff:

'If yon monks drown, it will serve them right for scorning the good old ways of simple folk and setting up new-fangled rules of life.'

Cuthbert thus tried to stem the torrent of abuse:

‘What mean ye, my brothers, by reviling men whom ye see in the very jaws of death? Were it not better to pray for their deliverance than to rejoice at their danger?’

Gruffly and angrily was he answered:

‘Let no man pray for them, no God pity them! Our old forms of worship they have taken away, and how to keep the new none kenneth!’

Then Cuthbert knelt to pray, bowing his face to the ground. Forthwith the gale veered and cast ashore, safe and sound, both rafts and crews, at a place conveniently near the monastery. The mood of the mob, thus put to the blush, also veered. Thenceforward they never tired of prating about the faith of worshipful master Cuthbert.

## CHAPTER XIV

## CEDD OF LASTINGHAM, APOSTLE OF ESSEX

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.

Isaiah, xxx, 15.

THE year 653 is memorable for the conversion of the Middle Angles, whose settlements nearly coincided with Leicestershire, and the reconversion of the East Saxons, who seem to have been, since their rejection of Mellit thirty-seven years earlier, sadly neglected by the clergy of Kent. From East Anglia they were parted by the marshy valley of the Stour. The efficient cause of both forward movements was the personal influence that flowed from the Christian court of Oswiu.

The Middle Angles had for their sub-king a son of Penda, named Peada, who had won his father's confidence by strength and nobility of character. His sister Cyneburh was already a Christian and the wife of Oswiu's eldest son Alhfrith. She must be carefully distinguished from the daughter of Cynegils who had been given in marriage to Oswald. When Peada sued for the hand of Oswiu's elder daughter Alhfled he was informed, as Edwin had been when he sued for the hand of Athelburh, that his conversion must precede the granting of any such suit. So convincing was the eloquence of the court preachers and the friendly persuasion of his brother-in-law that Peada in due time professed himself eager to become a Christian, apart altogether from his hope of thereby winning a bride. He was accordingly baptized by bishop Finan, and with him all his train of comrades and thanes, in the royal town then called the Near-the-Wall, twelve miles from the east coast, and now probably represented either by the suburb Pandon of Newcastle-on-Tyne, close to the Black Gate, or else by Benwell, the modern

form of the ancient Pen Fahel, which means Head of the Rampart. Four priests, who seemed well fitted for the task by learning and consistency of life, were appointed to teach and baptize his folk. Three of them, Adda, Betti and Cedd, were Angles; the fourth, Diuna, was a Scot. Adda's brother was the Utta who had escorted Eanfled by sea from Kent to Bamborough and had since become abbot of a monastery near Gateshead. Cedd had been one of Aidan's scholars at Lindisfarne and was the eldest of four brothers, all ordained to priesthood. The other three were named Cynibill, Caelin and Ceadda or Chad. All classes of Peada's subjects lent a ready ear to their new teachers, forsook the filth of idolatry and flocked together day by day to have it symbolically washed away in the wellspring of faith.

Even Penda was tolerant enough to let the preachers invade Mercia with their peaceful tidings; but he vented his disgust and contempt on professing Christians whose faith failed to bear, in their daily life, the fruit of good works. In his heart of heart he may well have been glad that his children should scale spiritual heights which age and clogging habit had made inaccessible to him. He may also have had a dim foreboding that in him the gods of his race had found their last champion, and may therefore have nobly determined to remain, at all costs, loyal to them. Like Napoleon Buonaparte and Garibaldi, he was one of those Men of Destiny whose course, like a cannon-ball's, cannot swerve. Five of his children and five of his grandchildren won the meed of saintship.

Sigeberht the Good, king of the East Saxons, so called to distinguish him from his predecessor the Little, owed his conversion to the friendship of Oswiu, who made full use of the opportunities provided by the younger king's frequent visits to his court. 'They cannot be gods,' he used to insist with brotherly earnestness, 'that are made by men's hands; neither wood nor stone, the chips of which have so many base uses, can form the substance of godhead.

Either they feed a fire, or are moulded into household pottery or thrown into the gutter and trampled under foot. We must rather think of God as too great for our mental grasp, too spiritual to be seen by the eye of man. Almighty He is, Eternal, the Creator of heaven, earth and the races of men, the Ruler of a world which He will justly judge. We must believe that His abode is not in worthless and perishable dross but in the heavens. We may feel sure that all who learn and do the will of their Creator receive from Him eternal rewards.'

By such eloquent testimony, often repeated, Oswiu did for Sigeberht what Albert had done for Sabert and Edwin for Eorpwald. Sigeberht's train of friends and counsellors withheld for a time their consent from his baptism, but became at length, by similar exhortations, no less fully convinced than he, and were baptized with him by bishop Finan at Near-the-Wall, probably about the same time as Peada and his Middle Angles.

Before he left Northumbria Sigeberht begged his host to provide him with teachers for his folk. Fully realizing the importance of this opening, Oswiu then recalled Cedd from Middle Anglia and sent him, attended by another priest, to Essex. With praiseworthy zeal and thoroughness, Cedd and his nameless comrade trudged afoot through the length and breadth of their new district and organized the church life of numerous converts. He then revisited his Northumbrian home and passed beyond to Lindisfarne in order to confer with Finan. When that bishop learnt from his friend how richly the mission to the East Saxons had been blest, he summoned, probably from Iona, two other Scotie bishops to join him in consecrating Cedd bishop of that folk. He was thus more heedful of the Nicene canon than Paulin had been in consecrating Honorius, or than Wilfrith afterwards was in consecrating Swidbert and Oftfor. At or about the same time he also consecrated Diuma bishop both of the Mercians and of the Middle Angles. Fit



priests for such high office were too scarce, remarks Beda in explanation, for either of these folks to be the only flock entrusted to a shepherd of souls. By the river Trent the Mercians proper were, like the East Anglians, divided into a north folk and a south folk.

On his return to his diocese Cedd made full use of his enlarged authority by ordaining priests and deacons to help him preach and baptize. For some of them he built churches which formed centres of quasi-parochial work. He also built two monastic churches round which dwelt busy swarms of monks, keeping, as well as it could be kept by untrained beginners, the rule of Iona and Lindisfarne. Of these two churches the principal stood on the tongue of land which lies between the Blackwater and Crouch estuaries. It is probably the ruinous chapel of St Peter, Ythanchester, in the parish of Bradwell. The other was built at Tilbury-on-Thames. The site of the former was the ancient Roman stronghold Othona, the massive ruins of which were reclaimed from the sea early in the latter half of the nineteenth century. There he carefully instructed those assistant clergy, all picked Essex men, none, so Beda seems to imply, imported from the north.

Cedd's episcopal duties did not hinder him from frequently visiting Northumbria, in order to keep in pastoral touch with his former flock. His brother Caelin had become a kind of chaplain to Oidilwald, the young sub-king of Deira. So deeply impressed was this king with Cedd's holiness, wisdom and strength of character that he begged his acceptance of a site for a monastery. The bishop accordingly chose a spot among the Pickering hills, nearer to caves of robbers and lairs of wild beasts than to peaceable homesteads, hoping thus to realize the ideal of Isaiah xxxv by making a spiritual desert fruitful of holy thoughts and deeds.

In order first to cleanse the place from the pollution of the many evil deeds which had there been done, he fasted

and prayed there, with Oidilwald's permission, during the ensuing Lent of the year 655. Except on Sundays, his only meal, eaten in the evening, consisted of bread, an egg and milk diluted with water. Thus, he assured his royal friend, had his teachers been wont to hallow sites chosen for monastery or church. Ten days before the end of Lent he was summoned away by that youngster on urgent business, possibly connected with the impending campaign, but left his brother Cynibill to finish his task. The monastery then built there became famous as Lastingham. Oidilwald himself often retired thither to join in the prayers or to hear preachers. On the slope of a long hill that looks northward from Kirkby Moorside may still be seen traces of Cedd's building. In the hollow below the church a narrow oasis of green turf forms a cheerful contrast to the widespread purple heather.

The reconversion of the East Saxons was to Anna a source not only of spiritual joy but of such political strength that in the year, 654, of Cedd's consecration, he tried, but miserably failed, to throw off the heathen yoke. Hardly one of his men survived the disastrous battle in which he and his eldest son Jurmin fell. The victor set on the throne of East Anglia Athelhere, the elder of Anna's two brothers, whose wife, Hereswith, may have taught him to hate the murderer of her cousin Oswini.

But Penda's own course was nearly run. During the twelve years of Oswiu's reign he had waged in Bernicia a harrying warfare which was checked neither by the double marriage alliance nor by the gift of Oswiu's young son, Ecgrith, as a hostage to the Mercian queen Cyneswith. It seems probable that, like her two daughters, she was Christian, and we know of none except Birin to whom they can have owed their conversion. Oswiu now tried to buy peace with priceless gifts of jewellery and plate; but, spurning the offer and deaf to every entreaty, Penda determined to make a clean sweep of the Bernician Angles. In order to

swell his host to irresistible strength he summoned to his aid all the Kymry. When the Welsh levies had mustered, each under its own leader, in the marchland of the upper Severn, side by side with the levies not only of the Mercian ealdormen but of the sub-kings Oidilwald and Athelhere, the united force marched northward along the coast road and was, from time to time, reinforced by the levies of Cumbria and Strathclyde. Accordingly, when Penda deployed his troops on the Manau which we call Linlithgow, no fewer than thirty leaders unfurled their banners. Athelhere had acted as Penda's agent in organizing the campaign; Oidilwald acted as his guide to the field of battle but drew off his warriors to a place of safety as soon as battle was joined. Having thus, probably under compulsion, before he was twenty years old, played fast and loose with both Oswiu and Penda, he completely disappears from history.

Outnumbered by a host thrice as large as they could muster, Oswiu and Alhfrith, like Oswald of yore, put their trust in the leadership of Christ. The former also bound himself by a twofold vow to dedicate his baby daughter Alfred to the monastic life, and to give twelve pieces of land as sites for as many monasteries. 'If the heathen king,' he is reported to have said, 'knoweth not how to treat our peace offerings, let us bring them to Him who well knoweth, the Lord our God.' At first he stood on the defensive by occupying Blackness Castle, the citadel of the ancient Caer Maunguid, and appeased the invaders by giving them all the cattle and intoxicating liquors he could collect in the neighbourhood. Then, while the hostile chieftains were gorged and drunken, he fell on them suddenly in the night. At the last moment Cadwalader, the Christian king of Gwynedd, unable, perhaps, any longer to kick against the pricks of conscience, drew off his forces. To his name, which means grasper of battle, was therefore added in Welsh tradition the sneering epithet Cadwommed, battle-shirker. The struggle had hardly begun when the enemy's

lines broke in flight. Among the slain were Athelhere and nearly all the other leaders. As the Kishon for Deborah and Barak, so the Winwaed, swollen by autumnal rains, fought for Oswiu, drowning many more than were cut down by the sword, and avenging, as the gleemen sang, the death of five kings.

In the river Winwaed is avenged  
the slaughter of king Anna,  
the slaughter of Sigeberht and Ecgric,  
the slaughter of St Oswald and Edwin the Fair.

The stream has been identified with the Avon, which forms the boundary between Linlithgow and Stirling. Traces of the name Winwaed, which means Battle Ford, seem to remain in the Fechtin Ford, about a mile above Manuel, and the Red Ford, half a mile higher up. Penda's bodyguard broke with him through the enemy's line, but they and he were overtaken and slain in Midlothian. Eighty, according to the Chronicle, was then the age of that grand old heathen. His invincible prowess, during twenty-two critical years, had the supremely important effect of compelling our forefathers to build their faith on a more solid foundation than desire of worldly prosperity. He was therefore, though he knew it not, a necessary agent of Christ and is, we may believe, enjoying his due reward.

Cyneburh, Penda's daughter, became the foundress and first abbess of a convent called after her Cyniburgacaster, the modern Castor near Peterborough. To her also Lady Connyburrow Walk and Coneygreve Close owe their names. Her dies natalis is March 6. Her sister Cyneswith was one of her nuns and became abbess after her. If it be true that her advice caused young Offa, the handsome and popular king of Essex, to accompany Copenred of Mercia into monastic seclusion at Rome, Cyneswith was alive in the year 709. The kinswoman Tibba of those two sisters dwelt near them at Ryhall, perhaps as an ankerss. Their

bodies and hers were, in the year 972, transferred by abbot Alfsi to Peterborough.

Merewald, the fourth of Penda's five sons, became sub-king of a district in the west of Mercia, now the county of Hereford, and married the Kentish princess Eormenburh, whose pet name seems to have been Eaba. She is also called Domneva, which is probably a contraction of Domina Eaba. He and his folk, the Hecana, owed their conversion to a Northumbrian priest, Edfrith. Milburh, the eldest of his three daughters, founded a convent of nuns at Wenlock and died, at the age of sixty, on June 25, in or about the year 722; but in the Hereford missal her day is February 23. Her mother founded on the isle of Thanet, at the place now called Minster, a convent of which her sister Mildred, after being trained at Chelles, became second abbess, having seventy nuns under her charge. Early in the eighth century Mildred and four other Kentish abbesses attested with signature and cross the famous privilege granted by king Wihtred to the churches and monasteries of his kingdom. Her day is July 13. Merewald's third daughter, Mildgith, was a nun at Eastry in Kent and died young, on January 17, 676. The successor of Merewald, his youngest brother Merchelm, was, like him, revered as a saint. So was his only son Merewin,

which from the holy sacrament  
Of baptism was taken by miracle express  
To the bliss of heaven to reign there endless.

These are the words of Henry Bradshaw, a true Benedictine monk of St Werburgh's, Chester, who died in the year 1513, soon after he had written them.

The good news of that deathblow to heathenism must have quickened the growth and renewed the vigour of Cedd's Christian community in Essex. Since the day of Winwidfield, November 15, 655, no ruler in Britain has disowned allegiance to the triune Godhead, Father, Son and

Holy Ghost. From another point of view Oswiu's victory ended in favour of the Angles the struggle for supremacy which the nominally Christian Kymry had been waging against them for nearly 200 years. Stone monuments still indicate four main lines along which the victors soon afterwards peacefully penetrated Cumbria:

(1.) along the Roman Wall to Bewcastle, Carlisle and Ruthwell;

(2.) over Stainmoor to Kirkby Stephen, Addingham and Kirkoswald;

(3.) up the Maiden Way to Lancaster, Hatton and Heversham;

(4.) over the fells or round the coast to hold the important harbour of Ravenglass, on both sides of which, at Irton and Waberthwaite, were Anglian settlements. The smooth and highly finished chisel work which covers the Irton cross bears witness to the excellence then attained by Northumbrian stonecraft. The Brythons of Strathclyde and the Scots of Argyle became, in consequence of his victory, mere tributaries of Oswiu; but over the Picts beyond the Forth he soon claimed full kingship, as the uncle and heir of their king Talorgan, who died in 657, after reigning four years.

In fulfilment of his vow Oswiu duly dedicated to monastic uses twelve pieces of land, each ten hides in area, six in Bernicia and six in Deira. They were to be battlefields whereon men who had preferred heavenly to earthly warfare would win by their prayers eternal peace for his folk. He also committed his daughter Alflred to the care of Hild, who was then ruling an island convent near Hartlepool. Two years later that abbess founded, on ten hides of land near Whitby, one of the pieces dedicated by Oswiu, the double monastery which gave her undying fame. There the young princess grew in the graces of the hidden life, became abbess in her turn, died in 713, her sixtieth year, and was buried beside her father and mother in the St

Peter's church where lay also the corpse of her grandfather Edwin.

There are good grounds for the conjecture that, soon after Winwidfield, the headquarters of government was removed from Bamborough to York. There Oswiu might hope at last to win the loyalty of Oswini's former subjects. Bernicia, relieved from pressure of invaders, might safely be entrusted to sub-kings chosen among the native ealdormen. Alhfrith was probably appointed sub-king, not of ~~of~~ Deira, but only of the modern West Riding, the Elmet and Loidis which had been conquered by Edwin. The Welsh population of that district was doubtless more thickly clustered and of higher mettle than elsewhere in Northumbria. By them chiefly was probably put on Oidilwald the pressure which drove him into the ill-starred host of Penda. As Alhfrith was only on his father's side descended from the hated invaders, he may well have been a sympathetic and popular ruler of that outlying district. His mother's name, Ri-emelth, seems to be Welsh for royal twin. Her grandfather Rum was perhaps the son of Urbgen who baptized Edwin. Alhfrith may also have been ruler of Lancashire, Westmorland and Cumberland.

Though his father-in-law had the right of a conqueror to the throne of Mercia, Peada was left in undisturbed sovereignty south of the Trent but survived his father only a few months. His fate was even more tragic than Oswini's, because his murder was contrived by the treachery, not of a rival Christian king, but of his own Christian wife, who, with almost fiendish perverseness, chose Eastertide for the commission of her crime. This recrudescence, in ruthless Athelfrith's granddaughter as well as in his son, of the proverbial cruelty of the Angle race is probably typical of many such relapses in all ranks of life. To Alhfred's crime was perhaps due, at least partly, the determination of the Mercian ealdormen to cast off their land her father's yoke. In the year 658, three of them, Immin, Eaba and

Eadberht, rebelled against Oswiu, drove out his viceroys and elected as their king Wulfhere, the second son of Penda, whom, on account of his youth, they had kept hidden. Together with him, they exercised their newly-won freedom, spiritual no less than civil, in joyous service of 'the Lord Christ, their true King, for the sake of the eternal kingdom in heaven.' Their first bishop, Diuma, died early in that year; his successor, another Scot named ~~C~~ollach, soon resigned and retired to Iona, perhaps because he was unwilling to transfer his worldly allegiance from Oswiu to Wulfhere. The vacancy was filled by Trumhere, the kinsman of Oswini who, as abbot of Gilling, had been earnestly praying both for that martyr and for the more hapless, because guilty, Oswiu. Though not reckoned among the Bretwaldas, Wulfhere was inferior to few of them in the extent of his dominion and the beneficence of his rule. His vigorous reign lasted seventeen years. To him Frithwold owed his place, the sub-king of Surrey who helped Erkenwald found a monastery at Chertsey.

In course of time, while both king and people were rejoicing in daily additions to the number of East Saxons who set their faces heavenward, it became Cedd's painful duty to excommunicate one of Sigeberht's thanes, who was also his kinsman but had, in defiance of the bishop's warning, wedded a woman who could not be his lawful wife. All converts were forbidden to enter the thane's house or eat at his table. In the easy-going fashion that betokens weakness of character the king set at naught this prohibition and accepted the offender's invitation to a banquet. As he was afterwards riding homewards thence to his palace, the bishop, also mounted on horseback, met him. Dimly aware, perhaps, that such good-natured behaviour was utterly wrong, Sigeberht leapt down and cowered, begging pardon, at the feet of Cedd, who had likewise dismounted. Touching the prostrate king



with his pastoral staff, the wrathful prelate sternly denounced retribution against the transgressor:

‘Because thou wouldest not refrain from entering the house of that banned wretch, in that very house thou must thyself die!’

Sigeberht was in fact soon afterwards there murdered by that very thane and his brother, who had both been exasperated, so they pleaded in excuse, by their king’s habit of freely forgiving wrongs done to himself. He was, as we have seen, unable to distinguish either between private and public duty, or between forgiveness and impunity, than which, as the Iron Duke truly said, nothing is more inhuman to the victims of the miscreant. His successor was his brother Swidhelm, whom Cedd baptized at Rendelsham in Suffolk, a royal vill of East Anglia. The new king’s conversion seems to have been due to the influence of Athelhere’s brother and successor, Athelwald, who took him by the hand as he climbed out of the font. From this action of Cedd we may infer his friendly co-operation with Berhtgils Boniface, the bishop who had brought an undiluted stream of Roman influence from Kent into East Anglia.

At the Conference of Whitby, held early in 664 to settle the Easter controversy, Cedd acted as interpreter and won praise by his alertness. Whether he had, like his brother Chad, learnt Gaelic in Ireland, or from the Scotie monks of Lindisfarne, is not recorded. In obedience to the decision of Oswiu, he abandoned the Scotie reckoning and at once introduced the catholic into his diocese. Later in the same year he made a second journey northward to visit Lastingham and there, on October 26, fell a victim to the devastating pestilence which had already, on July 14, proved fatal to Frithona Deusdedit, the first English archbishop of Canterbury, and to Earconberht, king of Kent. The brethren of Cedd’s East Saxon monastery no sooner heard of his death and burial than they gave a

touching proof of their affectionate devotion to their father in God. Some thirty of them made their way to Lastingham, longing either to live or die, whichever might be their lot, near his body. All were heartily welcomed by their fellow soldiers, but all shared his fate, except one little lad, who had not then been baptized and whose preservation was therefore attributed to Cedd's own intercession in the spirit realm. After that marvellous escape, so Bede ~~tells~~ it, from eternal death he lived long enough to become a useful priest and a devout student of Holy Writ.

In Cedd's diocese the same visitation of pestilence sifted tares from wheat. Essex was then ruled, under the overlordship of Wulfhere, partly by the devout Sebbi, partly by his nephew Sighere. Sebbi's subjects, fortified by their king's example, clung with unflinching loyalty to the new faith. Sighere, on the contrary, and very many of his subjects, dwellers probably in and near London, fell back on their old worship, forsaking their belief in their own eternal destiny and hoping to prolong their earthly life by propitiation of heathen gods. When news of this apostasy came to the ears of king Wulfhere, he sent to reclaim them a party headed by Jaruman, who had, jointly with Finan, baptized him and, in the year 662, succeeded Trumhere as bishop of the Mercians. With such indefatigable zeal did this devoted missionary and his companions set about their task, exploring every corner of the land, that they brought back both king and people to the way of righteousness. The heathen temples and altars were either abandoned or destroyed, the churches were reopened, the name of Christ so regained its constraining power over the stray sheep that they preferred to die, putting their whole trust in Him, rather than live in the foulness of unbelief. With joy and thankfulness dancing in their hearts, Jaruman, his clergy and preachers returned home. His work among the East Saxons was continued by Erkenwald, who became, in the year 675, third

bishop of London. Under the patronage of Wulfhere he founded two monasteries; the first, which he ruled himself, at Chertsey in Surrey; the other, at Barking in Essex, he committed to the care of his wise and holy sister Athelburh. Their father's name was Offa; their birthplace Stallington in Lindsey. Erkenwald used his own patrimony for the endowment of both houses, and summoned Hildelith from some Neustrian convent, probably Faremoutier, to instruct Athelburh in the rules of monastic life. Like Faremoutier Barking became a double monastery; the monks were kept so strictly apart from the nuns that they had even a separate chapel. On October 11, 664, the disastrous pestilence proved fatal to Athelburh. Hildelith was then elected abbess in her stead, but the same scourge had woefully thinned her family. One of the victims was a small boy named Asica, about three years old, who was being reared among the nuns. With his last breath he thrice called one of them, Eadgyth, Eadgyth, Eadgyth! On that selfsame day she followed him to their eternal home.

Cedd's first grave at Lastingham was outside the group of monastic buildings; but when, in course of time, a stone church was built in honour of the Blessed Virgin, his body was reverently entombed at the north end of the altar. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, in the course of repairs to Kirkdale Church, his sculptured tombstone was found by diggers. The ornamentation consists chiefly of such interlaced scroll work as began, about twenty years after Cedd's death, to display the skill attainable by Northumbrian masons. Near it was found a stone slab which probably covered, at the south end of the same altar, the tomb of the hapless Oidilwald. On it are sculptured a beautiful raised cross and arabesque leaf-tracery. Round the four angles of the cross runs the runic inscription:

# NORTHUMBRIA

A. D. 670





A copy of the design now adorns the tombstone of Joseph Barber Lightfoot in the chapel of Bishop Auckland.

Fortunately for the East Saxons, the reign of Sebbi lasted thirty years. So remarkable was his humble piety and simplicity that men said he was fitter to be a bishop than a king. Only his wife kept him so long at the helm of state. At last, when disabled by illness, he became a monk and soon passed painlessly and happily away. His tomb in Old St Paul's kept his memory green till the year of the Great Fire.

Oswiu's thanko offering for his victory was measured, as we have seen, by reference to a unit of land, the hide, which will often recur in this book, and may therefore fitly be here explained. Bēda's equivalent Latin phrase, *terra unius familiae*, tells us that a hide of land was deemed enough to support one household. The head of such a household was the free ceorl; the land included arable strips, a grazing lot in the common meadow and the right to use the undistributed woodland waste, not only by felling timber but by fattening swine on the undergrowth. The acreage of the hide varied inversely as its fertility. A conveyance of land included not only cattle but theows or enslaved tillers of the soil, some of whom had for their ancestors captives, whether Brythons or pre-Brythonic aborigines, taken as lawful spoil by the earliest Angle, Saxon or Jute invaders. It seems probable that in Britain as in Gaul, during the Roman occupation, Christianity was almost entirely confined to the cities. If so those theows were as heathen as their captors. Theows who belonged to one of the conquering races had, for the most part, either been, as baseborn offspring, sold into slavery by their own fathers or surrendered their own freedom in payment of their debts.

In the Tribal Hidage, that ancient land survey of all England, which may well be the tribute roll of the three Northumbrian Bretwaldas, 120 acres constitute the standard hide.

## CHAPTER XV

### WILFRITH CLIMBING

And the child grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord and also with men. 1 Sam. ii, 26.

**H**E was born in 634, the 'loathsome' year of apostasy, and is introduced to us as a bright and handsome boy of thirteen, who used to hand the dishes and fill the mead-horns for the companion thanes of king Oswiu when they feasted in his father's hall. Their host may well have been one of the twelve who helped Oswald rally an army round the cross at Hevenfeld. He seems to have retired from active service to the landed estate which had rewarded his fidelity. Instead of a kind mother Wilfrith had a harsh stepmother and therefore begged his father to send him to court. One day accordingly, in the year 648, he rode into Bamborough, escorted by a retinue of servants. Their horses were the best in his father's stable, their clothing and armour such as befitted the first entry of a young nobleman into the royal presence. Thus early in life was his taste for pompous display generously gratified.

By some of the thanes who knew him he was warmly commended to the young queen Eanfled, whose patronage was readily bestowed on so promising a lad. Soon afterwards an aged companion thane named Cudda, whose faithful service had endeared him to the king, became disabled by paralysis and resolved to join the monastic brotherhood of Lindisfarne. To him Wilfrith was assigned by the queen as his attendant. Having gladly accepted the charge he submitted, we are assured, with such hearty goodwill to the tasks and restraints laid on him that he won fatherly affection from all the seniors, and brotherly

love from the boys of his own age who were being trained in the school. He learnt by heart the Latin version of the Psalter known as the Gallican, which Jerome had made at Bethlehem from the Septuagint text and which now forms part of the Vulgate. On the death of Aidan in 651 Cudda was elected abbot and, seeing doubtless that the place was too strait for the impulsive and clever lad, kindly gave Wilfrith leave to depart. His eager imagination had been so kindled by what he had heard from the queen's chaplain of Rome and Roman ways that he begged to be sent thither, though none of the Angle folk had then crossed the Alps except in a slave-gang. As Eanfled owed her faith to Roman teachers she naturally encouraged, and may even have proposed, the bold adventure. After taking counsel with his father she sent him to her cousin Earconbert, king of Kent, there to await the finding of a trustworthy companion for his long and arduous journey.

The young traveller's hostess was Anna's eldest daughter, the holy Sexburh. During the year he spent at their court he won the affection of the royal pair by his devout and studious habits, even committing to memory another Latin version of the Psalter, known as the Roman, being Jerome's revision of the old Italic version. Many passages thus twice lightheartedly learnt, as gymnastic for his active mind, must have been meat and drink to him in the anxious crises of his tempestuous career.

At last, when the delay was becoming tedious, one of Oswiu's companion thanes, named Biscop Baducing, six years older than Wilfrith, came hurrying through Kent on his way Romeward and was easily persuaded to take his fellow pilgrim in his train. He also had abandoned his worldly prospects in order, as Beda puts it, to take service under the true King.

Wilfrith found Lyon so fascinating that he lingered there; but his elder companion, being cast in a sterner mould, would not wait; so they parted in dudgeon. The



archbishop of the city, Aunemund, captivated by Wilfrith's handsome face and winning manners, entertained him and his train of servants with lavish hospitality. His first impression was deepened, we are told, by the sensible talk, strenuous activity and ripe steadiness of character which distinguished his guest. Together, we may feel sure, they climbed the hill of Fourvières, the summit of which had been, in the year 177, the scene of the famous martyrdoms. With the splendid panorama of the Rhone and Sâone valleys outspread before them, the younger man eagerly listened to the elder's entrancing tales of the ancient glory of the city and the chequered fortunes of the Christian community. The archbishop's brother, Dalfin, was then count of Lyon and had an unmarried daughter. This wealthy heiress was offered to Wilfrith, and also the government of a large district, if he would but stay with Aunemund and become his adopted son. The young pilgrim accepted the adoption, but gave such good reasons for declining the marriage that he was liberally furnished with guides and resources for completing his journey to the apostolic see. There, in the church of St Andrew on the Coelian Hill, where Gregory and Austin had been wont to worship, Wilfrith, kneeling before the altar, earnestly prayed for ability to learn and eloquence to teach the Gospel in all its fullness. Before he rose from his knees he felt assured that his prayer had been granted. After spending several days in going the round of the holy places he found a good friend in Boniface, the papal archdeacon, and passed many months in learning from him the four Gospels, the Catholic reckoning of Easter, the Roman ritual and forms of prayer, as they stand in the Gelasian and Gregorian Sacramentaries.

Wilfrith's first visit to Rome coincided with a crisis in the history of the papacy important enough for a digression. In the year 638 the vigorous Emperor Heraclius tried to pacify his Monophysite subjects by asserting, in his famous

Ecthesis, that, though there might be two natures in Christ, there was only one will. The Patriarch of Constantinople agreed with him, but the new heresy found no favour in the West and aroused bitter controversy just at the time when the very existence of Christendom and the Empire was being threatened by Islam. Ten years later, in the year 648, his grandson, Constans, a lad of seventeen, tried to hush the matter up by removing the Ecthesis from the doors of the Church of the Holy Wisdom and posting there his no less famous Type, which forbade any to speak henceforth either of one will or two in Christ. To Pope Martin I this proceeding seemed so impudently presumptuous that he summoned a council which met in 649 and was attended by 202 Italian bishops. From the place of meeting it is called the Council of the Lateran, as the ancient basilica of our Saviour was then beginning to be named. A unanimous decree upheld the doctrine of the two wills and fulminated anathemas against the opposite party. Consequently, on the night of June 18, 653, Martin was roughly dragged from his bed in front of the high altar of that basilica by the exarch Theodore and shipped off to Constantinople. There, though in feeble health, he was imprisoned and afterwards, more strictly, in the Crimea, where he died a true martyr on September 16, 654.

Seven weeks earlier, on August 10, in defiance of the canons and to the horror of all pious and orthodox citizens of Rome, the pliable Eugenius had been elected pope by order of Constans. To him, perhaps before the death of Martin, Wilfrith was introduced by Boniface, in order that he might bow his head beneath the interloper's hand. Then, fortified by the relics he had collected, he returned to Lyon and stayed there as the guest of Aunemund, receiving instruction from learned teachers. By Aunemund himself he was tonsured in the Roman way.

A tragic event suddenly broke the thread of his pleasant life. In the year 657 that prelate was, by order of Ebroin,

beheaded as a traitor in the market-place of Châlons-sur-Saône. Wilfrith showed the strength of his affection by following him thither and offering to share his benefactor's fate. With life pulsing strong in his healthy frame, being then only twenty-three years old, he stripped in readiness for the death-blow. Awestruck by his noble bearing, the executioners asked, 'Who is yon handsome youngster?' and were told by the bystanders that he was an Angle from oversea, a fellow-countryman therefore of beloved Bathildis. 'Spare him!' they cried. After that narrow escape he reverently buried his second ~~father~~, made his way homeward and gave his relics due credit for the safety of his journey. The crowning victory of Winwidfield had, in the midst of his five years' absence, dealt the death-blow to aggressive heathenism. He was heartily welcomed by Alhfrith, who was then ruling Elmet as sub-king; and received from him a gift of land for a monastery at a place which has been variously identified with Stamford near York, Stainforth near Doncaster and Stainforth near Giggleswick. This was Alhfrith's second gift of land 'for the healing of his soul.' His first and best had already, while Wilfrith was basking in the prospect of becoming Aunemund's heir, been bestowed on abbot Eata and the monks of Melrose. When he first crossed his patron's threshold Wilfrith expanded his greeting into the following short homily, which may be taken as a fair sample of the eloquence which seemed to Alhfrith 'angelic':

'Jesus Christ, the son of God, gave this order to his disciples and to their chief, the Apostle Peter: Into whatsoever house ye enter, say, Peace be unto this house. The groundwork of this peace we ought first to lay in ourselves between body and soul, as the teacher of the Gentiles declared, saying, Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Then between us and our neighbours peace ought to be kept, according to the precept of Jesus Christ, Have salt in yourselves and be at peace one with another.'

Little did the preacher guess, while he spoke these words, how far from peaceful would be the remaining half-century of his earthly course.

Time passed: the two young men became, 'like David and Jonathan,' bosom friends, and persuaded one another that they were chosen vessels sent to purge their Church of Scotie error. Eata, Cuthbert and the other Ripon brethren were accordingly requested by Alhfrith either to change their customs or depart. They of course departed; Wilfrith promptly supplanted them, probably in the year 661, just before Colman succeeded Finan as bishop of Lindisfarne. It was in fact a preliminary skirmish to the conflict which took place at Whitby, three years later, in which Colman was one of the protagonists.

The other, Agilbert, had lately travelled to Northumbria from Wessex, in order to visit both Oswiu and Alhfrith. He was by birth a Frank, had been consecrated bishop in Gaul, and had lived a long time in Ireland studying the Scriptures in some of the monastic schools, which were then at the height of their well-deserved fame. After the death, on December 3, 650, of Birin, the apostle of Wessex, Agilbert offered his services to King Cenwealh, who was only too glad to admit to the vacant see such a learned and active man. In the year 663 Cenwealh divided the diocese without consulting him and installed at Winchester a Wessex man named Wini, who had also been consecrated bishop in Gaul. It may be noted in passing that, in the year 585, three such 'vacant bishops' as he and Agilbert signed the acts of the Council of Macon. The king's excuse for this arbitrary proceeding was his weariness of the bishop's foreign accent or dialect. Deeply offended, Agilbert promptly resigned the see of Dorchester. It seems hard to believe that so able a man let twelve years pass without learning the language of his flock, which was closely akin to his mother tongue.

By almsgiving and sympathy the new abbot of Ripon

endeared himself to the poór, the orphan, the widow and the ailing. He won the respect and goodwill of all classes by his tranquil humility, sober and simple habits, unfailing kindness, clear and powerful preaching. Yet he was still, though tonsured, merely a layman. At Alhfrith's request Agilbert ordained him priest, thus encroaching on the prerogative of bishop Colman, whose episcopal orders all three men were presumptuous enough to regard as invalid. That sub-king, we are told, first learned from Cenwealh the Roman ways he so strongly preferred.

The precarious tenure of Ripon by Eata is a noteworthy exception to the revolutionary rule which governed the dedication of land to the service of God. Before their acceptance of Christianity the new invaders of Britain had carved out of their folkland, as it was called, only life estates. Gifts therefore of land, even from a king to his gesiths, lasted no longer than the joint life of grantor and grantee. The earliest recorded gift of land in perpetuity is Albert's to the cathedral church of Rochester, as follows:

' . . . . tibi, Sancte Andrea, tuaeque ecclesiae . . . .  
trado aliquantulum telluris mei . . . . Hoc cum  
consilio Laurencii episcopi et omnium principum  
meorum signo sanctae crucis confirmavi eosque  
jussi ut mecum idem facerent. Amen.'

Such a boc or charter, the joint act of king and witan, was deemed sufficient to confer permanent ownership not only on church or monastery but on a private individual. Bocland however, as it was called, still owed to the fyrd its tale of territorials, to burhs and bridges all needful repairs; the triple obligation is commonly called *trinoda necessitas*.

## CHAPTER XVI

## CUTHBERT HOSPITALLER AND PRIOR

In the apostles of England, the ascetic and the missionary characters were happily blended. Their devout retirement was a means of gaining rest and strength of body, mind and spirit for new work. During the first century of the conversion every monastery was a mission station and every mission station a monastery.

William Stubbs, *Rolls Series*, vol. xxxviii (ii), p. xv

THE crowning event of Cuthbert's boyhood had for its background the star-spangled firmament and for its foreground the bleak and bare Lammermuir Hills, where he was one of a company of shepherds. While his fellows slept he was as usual passing the night in wakeful adoration. Suddenly he had a vision which may have been due to a shower of meteors flashing athwart the sky. So ecstatic was his mood that they seemed to him a choir of angels descending to earth and bearing back to their home on high a soul of surpassing beauty. On the morrow came tidings that Aidan had, at the very moment of his vision, entered into life through the gate of death. At last, surely, after long years of humble heart-searching, Cuthbert's hour had come. Having enjoyed such a clear view of the glory of heaven, he could no longer trifle with the shows of earth. As soon as he had told off his cattle to their owners, he mounted his horse and rode away, spear in hand, down the haughs of the Leader to old Melrose, whither, rather than to Lindisfarne, he was attracted by the fame of Prior Boisil. By him, from the gate of the monastery, the young traveller was being watched as he leapt down from his horse, flung to his attendant the spear which had long protected his sheep from wolves, and directed

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his steps towards the church. His mien and bearing made the same impression on Boisil as had Nathanael's on Jesus; and while the stranger was drawing nigh the bystanders heard the words, 'Behold a true servant of God!' fall from the prior's lips. Seventy years later one of them, named Sigefrith, was, in the monastery of Jarrow, gasping his last breath and thirsting for his joyous entry into life.

When Cuthbert was close enough to explain the object of his journey Boisil gave him a hearty welcome and bade him await the return of abbot Eata, who was then absent. A few days later Eata granted Cuthbert his heart's desire by tonsuring him and admitting him to the holy brotherhood. None walked more steadfastly along their narrow way. His abstemious habits had so ripened his natural vigour that he was foremost in all the common tasks; but, for that very reason, he could not fast so strictly as the rest.

The cluster of huts which formed the monastery was an offshoot of Lindisfarne, a kind of mission station planted amid a wilderness on a green sheltered slope not far below the confluence of the Leader and the Tweed, which nearly encircles the site. The name, in its ancient form Mailros, may perhaps be derived from the Gaelic *mul*, bare, and *rhos*, promontory; or may simply mean a place of many roses. 'The wild rose,' wrote J. Cockburn Muir, 'is indigenous. There is no nook, nor cranny, no bank nor brae which is not, in this time of roses, ablaze with their exuberant loveliness. In gardens the cultured rose is so prolific that it spreads, literally, like a weed.'

It was perhaps during this earlier period of his life at Old Melrose that Cuthbert made his first venture in the warfare of the anchorite by retiring for a period of prayerful seclusion to a cave or weem on the summit, 600 feet high, of the Rock of Weem in Strathtay, about a mile from the village Dull. Demoniical spectres were believed to

haunt the spot; according to the legend the Ancient Enemy of mankind tried in vain to dislodge Cuthbert by appearing to him in monstrous shape and assailing him with threats and darts.

Cuthbert's monastic life thus began a few days later than the date, August 31, 651, of Aidan's death. His age, like Wilfrith's, was then little more than fifteen. In the latter half of that decade Alhfrith, the sub-king of Elmet, granted to Eata thirty hides of land at Ripon for a new monastic settlement. The party of monks he took thither included Cuthbert, to whom was assigned the care of guests. Never probably was simple hospitality more gracefully bestowed than by that sturdy and mirthful young monk, out of whose dreamy eyes shone the gladdening light of brotherly love. In the bleak dawn of one chilly winter morning, while snow lay on the ground, he found a benumbed and hungry wayfarer seated in the hut set apart for guests. With his own hands he washed, dried and rubbed the stranger's feet, holding them against his own bosom to warm them. Food at that early hour he could not offer without breaking a rule. Only by the most urgent entreaties, adjuring him in the Lord's name, did he overcome the other's reluctance to wait until the conclusion of tierce. Then the attentive host set on a table before his guest the few crusts which were all he could find in the larder, and went to the kitchen in search of a freshly baked loaf. When he returned the man had vanished, but on the crisp snow not a footprint could be seen. Then he knew that he had been unawares entertaining an angel. As he was putting back the table in the refectory he met the scent of new bread, emitted by three warm loaves on the board, white as lilies, fragrant as roses, luscious as honey, kneaded in no earthly bakehouse but brought from some paradise of bliss.

Expelled from Ripon, in the year 661, because they refused to change, at Alhfrith's bidding, their reckoning



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of Easter and other customs, this colony of monks returned to Melrose. Soon afterwards Cuthbert was smitten by the prevalent plague. Dreading the loss of a comrade so dear that they felt they could hardly live without him, the brethren spent a whole night in prayer for his recovery. No sooner had this been reported to Cuthbert in the morning by one of them than he exclaimed:

‘God cannot have been deaf to the prayers of so many holy men; why then am I lying here? Give me staff and shoon!’

He tried hard to walk, leaning on his staff, and gradually shook off his weakness; but one of his tumours became chronic and was a constant source of intestinal pain during the remainder of his life. The inspectors of his breastbone in the year 1827 found a deep hole which had been worn by an obstinate tumour of so long standing that the mouth of the hole was half covered by an aftergrowth of bone. This covering had also been perforated by ulceration.

None doubtless had prayed more fervently for Cuthbert than his father in the spiritual life, prior Boisil, whose inner vision was at that time made clearer by the approach of death. As soon as he was assured of Cuthbert’s recovery he foretold, first that his beloved pupil would pass unscathed through future visitations of the plague, and then that the beginning of his own fatal seizure was only a week distant. He therefore bade Cuthbert learn as much as possible from him in the short interval. It so happened that his copy of the Fourth Gospel filled just seven quarto sheets of parchment. Having agreed to choose that priceless record of their common Master, they read and discussed one sheet on each of those gloomily hopeful days. Both heeded only its simple teaching about the faith that works through love, and forbore to sound doctrinal depths. The end came on September 9, which is kept as Boisil’s dies natalis. At Durham his skull is preserved in a richly

decorated case; a turret of ivory, decked with figures of gold and silver, contains a lock of his hair, his shirt of goat's hair and other garments. A book and a comb complete the treasury of his relics. After him were named the sheep-fair town St Boswell's-on-Tweed and a church built in his honour at Tweedmouth.

Cuthbert succeeded him as prior of Melrose and became, like him, an ardent missionary in the surrounding district. He found many nominal Christians who were dishonouring their name by evil deeds. To some the ruthless plague seemed so inconsistent with the Fatherhood of God that they fell back on idolatrous amulets, charms and spells, as the best means of lowering the awful death-rate. Cuthbert did his utmost to check such apostasy and revive drooping faith. From village to village he plodded his way, sometimes on horseback, more often on foot. In those days a travelling monk or priest was no less heartily welcomed in every Northumbrian village than is to-day an S.P.G. catechist in the scattered hamlets of Western Canada. At a sign from him all assembled to hear the Word of Truth. Willing listeners were they, and even more willing doers of such Christian duties as proved not too hard. Wild passions, intensified through countless ages by the fierce struggle for existence, cannot, of course, be tamed in a single generation. So skilful a teacher was Cuthbert, so well aimed were his shafts of homely wit, so brightly shone his angelic face, that none could hide secret guilt from that searching look, but all openly unburdened the consciences which, as they instinctively felt, were already laid bare. Nor did they fail to follow up their confession with such meet fruits of repentance as he enjoined. His favourite haunts were solitary homesteads, perched aloft on steep and rugged mountains, which less hardy soldiers of the Cross scarcely dared look at, much less climb. The penury and boorishness also of the dwellers in such forbidding spots kept away from them less great-hearted

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ministers of the Gospel than the young prior. To the task of winning, by precept and example, those neglected folk Cuthbert so thoroughly devoted himself that his expedition kept him away from the monastery often for a whole week, sometimes for two or three weeks, now and then for a full month.

One of his longest journeys, the object of which is nowhere stated and is hard to guess, bore him through Teviotdale and Ewisdale to the coast; thence across the Solway Firth to Kirkcudbright, which preserves his name. The Picts of the surrounding district took from the river Nith their distinctive name Niduarian. Soon after Christmas Day he and his two companions had a fair passage, but had no sooner landed than a violent storm arose and hindered the speedy return they had expected. They had brought with them no food and were therefore famished as well as frozen. After several wakeful nights spent in prayer, probably within the natural cavern known as Torr's Cave, which retreats fifty feet into the precipitous rock, Cuthbert thus cheerfully, on Epiphany morning, addressed his comrades:

'Let us obey our Lord's command, Seek and ye shall find. He will surely enable us to keep the festival of the descent of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove after his baptism; the day also on which, to strengthen the faith of his disciples, He turned water into wine at Cana.'

They followed him seaward and found on the beach three lumps of porpoise flesh, cleaned and dressed for cooking as though with a knife by human hands. After returning thanks he remarked that, as each lump would feed one of them for three days, they might expect calm weather on the fourth. This proved to be a true forecast. One of the brethren who shared the adventure was named Tych. He became a priest, survived Cuthbert many years and never tired of telling the tale.

Ebchester in Durham, the site of her first convent, and St Abb's Head, the site of her second, enshrine the name of an abbess who was half-sister of king Oswiu. They had the same mother, but her father was not king Athelfrith. The second was, like St Hilda's at Whitby, a double monastery, endowed by Oswiu with a wide stretch of waste land south of the Lammermuir Hills. From the top of their jutting cliff, which rises 500 feet sheer above the stormy sea, Abb and her family could gaze northward on the coast of Fife, southward on Bam-borough looming, in lofty eminence, over Lindisfarne. Cuthbert accepted her invitation to spend a few days there and gave her community the benefit of his eloquence and example. According to his custom, while the rest slept in their beds, he went out alone to pray and returned just in time for nocturns. One night his silent departure was noticed by one of the brethren, who, prompted by curiosity, stealthily followed him. He saw him descend to the shore, walk into the sea shoulder deep and there pass hour after hour chanting psalms amid the roar of the waves. At the first streak of dawn Cuthbert climbed to the beach and knelt to pray. Forthwith a pair of seals followed him, sprawled on the sand behind him, and began not only to warm his feet with their breath but to wipe them with their shag. Having thus paid due honour to a worthy man and received his blessing, they glided back to their watery home. At the hour of nocturns Cuthbert took his place in church. The spy was so awestruck by what he had seen that he could hardly stagger back to his cell; and shame so burdened his conscience that, as soon as the service was over, he went straight to Cuthbert, fell on his knees before him and, with tears streaming down his cheeks, humbly begged pardon, feeling sure that his fault was already known. By promising to keep the matter secret during Cuthbert's lifetime he won full and free forgiveness.

Some time afterwards that Coldingham community

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became infected first with frivolity and love of fine clothes, then with graver moral disorder. Even of the seniors only the abbess escaped the taint. Her death, on August 25, 681, was followed by a fire which consumed all the buildings and was regarded as a heaven-sent punishment. So deeply distressed was Cuthbert by this deplorable lapse that he made a strict rule forbidding any woman to cross the threshold of his monastic church. The rule was applied after his death to the churches at Chester-le-Street and Durham, where his wandering relics found a resting-place. On the island of Lindisfarne, in the midst of a green sward, he set apart for the use of women a church thence called the Green Kirk. On that site now stands the parish church.

It may be taken for granted that prior Cuthbert won the fatherly love of his abbot no less than of Boisil. Eata had been one of the twelve picked boys whom Aidan first trained. There is ample testimony that in devout simplicity and gentleness he was second only to his master. He set his prior the salutary example, which Cuthbert had the good sense to follow, of submitting to the decision of the Synod of Whitby. Thus, three years after they had withstood the arbitrary order of Alhfrith, both men, together with Cedd and Chad, sacrificed their cherished tradition in the interest of catholic unity. When, after the retirement of Colman and the other irreconcilables, Eata became abbot of Lindisfarne as well as of Melrose, he delegated his new authority to Cuthbert. Their unselfish surrender was so complete that by their joint authority the Benedictine rule there gradually displaced the rule of Iona, in spite of stubborn resistance to the change. Among the brethren left behind by Colman were some who shared his narrow-minded conservatism but lacked his self-sacrificing humility. They must have been dumbfounded by Cuthbert's rare combination of rock-like firmness with lamb-like meekness. Day after day he assembled all the brethren to hear his arguments in favour of the change.

When the insolent and bitter reproaches of his opponents began to weary him he suddenly rose and, by leaving the room, dissolved the meeting; but, as no feeling of resentment disturbed the tranquillity of his mind, so no frowning look clouded the bright cheerfulness of his countenance. On the following day, as though forgetful of what had passed, he repeated the same arguments to the same audience. Thus, little by little, he won their submissive acquiescence.

Such was his ardent zeal for watching and prayer that sometimes, so the brethren believed, he passed three or four nights running without a wink of sleep. For so long a time, at least his bed in the common dormitory was empty. Either he withdrew to some retired spot for an ecstasy of prayer, or, while he chanted psalms, his hands were busy twisting ropes or weaving baskets. Sometimes also he beguiled his weariness by making a circuit of the island and peering closely into every corner to see that all went well. He used thus to chide the faint-heartedness of brothers who grumbled whenever a chance noise disturbed their night's rest or their midday siesta:

‘Nobody annoys me by awakening me from sleep but rather gladdens me, by thus making me shake off dull sloth and do or think of something useful.’

So fiercely did his conscience sting him, so intense was his longing for a more spiritual life, that he could never celebrate at mass without shedding a flood of tears. In deepest penitence he followed the example of the Crucified by offering himself, soul and body, as a living sacrifice to God. At the Sursum Corda his own heart was so truly uplifted that his words were almost inarticulate. Though his zeal for righteousness made him deal sternly with sinners, penitents found him so tenderly sympathetic that he was often the first to shed tears during the confession and always ready to share the penance. In his apparel he struck

the happy mean between daintiness and disorder. By using only undyed wool he set his face against the bright colours which were, even in convents, the prevailing fashion. This example became a Lindisfarne tradition.

One day Cuthbert took with him, among his band of helpers, on a teaching and baptizing expedition in Teesdale, a young lad, who walked beside him. When they had tramped far enough over the moors to be very tired, without coming in view of their journey's end, their talk was somewhat as follows:

C. 'Who, thinkest thou, comrade, hath to-day prepared a meal for thee?'

L. 'Indeed, sir, I know nobody on this road, and dare not hope that any stranger will have pity on us.'

C. 'Learn, sonny, always to have faith and hope in the Lord, because a faithful servant of God never dieth of hunger. Seest thou yonder an osprey flying aloft? It may be the Lord's will that he help us find a meal to-day.'

As thus they talked they came to a stream and beheld the osprey perched on its bank. At Cuthbert's bidding the lad ran thither, picked up a large salmon which the bird had just then pulled out of the stream, brought it to Cuthbert and was gently reproved as follows:

'What, my son, hast thou done? Why didst thou not give our ministering angel his share? Cut it quickly in half and render him his due!'

The half which they kept was broiled and shared with the rest of the party.

During one of Cuthbert's frequent visits to his foster-mother, the widow Kenswith, a house at the east end of the village caught fire and bundles of burning thatch were being driven over the other houses by a strong east wind. So fierce were the flames that none could come near enough to quench them with water. In her alarm Kenswith ran home and begged her foster-son to help them by praying,

before the whole village was ablaze. Having reassured her, he went out and bowed himself to the ground in silent supplication. The wind then veered to the west and the village was safe.

Among the king's reeves Cuthbert had a dear friend named Hildmer, whom he made a point of visiting whenever he passed near enough to his homestead. The man himself, his wife and his whole household were devoutly Christian and given to every kind of good work. One day a demon seemed to have taken possession of the woman. She gnashed her teeth, uttered piteous groans and flung her limbs wildly about. When she had fallen and lay foaming, as though in her death-agony, Hildmer sped on horseback to Lindisfarne and, ashamed to confess the truth, merely begged for a priest to housel her. As Cuthbert was seeking one he had a mental vision of the woman's plight and resolved to go himself to her aid. While they rode together, the fear that Cuthbert might regard his wife's symptoms as evidence of hypocrisy made Hildmer weep; but these cheering words reassured him:

'Weep not as though I shall find thy wife other than I could wish. Well aware am I, though thou wouldest blush to tell me, that she is vexed with an evil spirit; but I also know that before our arrival her foe will be put to flight and she will be free. It is part of God's hidden wisdom that in this world not only the sin-stained but also the pure-hearted be sometimes in the power of Satan.'

Surely enough, at the approach of the Holy Spirit which filled the man of God, the evil spirit fled, and the woman, thus released, arose as though awaking from heavy sleep. When she had grasped the bridle of Cuthbert's horse she felt that her cure was complete.

Many years later, after Cuthbert had become bishop, Hildmer himself fell seriously ill. One of the friends who came to sit at his bedside brought a loaf of bread which Cuthbert had lately blessed and given him. 'Taste this!'



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said he to Hildmer; ‘unless the sluggishness of our faith hinders, it may cure thee.’ All present, though laymen, were devout Christians and solemnly assured one another that their faith in the virtue of the bread was unclouded by the shadow of a doubt. A cupful of water was then consecrated by dropping into it a few crumbs of the loaf. No sooner had Hildmer swallowed the refreshing draught than all his pain fled. His complete recovery soon followed.

## CHAPTER XVII

## ALDHELM LEARNING AND WRITING.

The measuring-lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, mine inheritance is acceptable unto me.

Psalm xvi, 7.

ONE of the feeders of the Bath Avon is the brook Ingelbourne, which the Welsh called Bladon. At the confluence stood, early in the seventh century, the ruins of *Caer Bladon*, one of the twenty-eight walled cities left by the Romans in Britain. Thither, in the reign of *Cynegils*, came from Ireland, where he had been ‘beset by thieves and robbers,’ a pious and learned Scot named *Maelduib*. Having landed at *Avonmouth*, he tramped the Roman road to Bath and finished his journey by passing along the *Fosseway* through the recesses of *Selwood*. In *Burnvale*, under the beetling south side of the narrow neck by which was then approached the fortress, and now the abbey church, he built of clay and wattle a lowly hermitage. His Welsh neighbours were Christian and fairly civilized. Farms well stocked with cattle and ponies filled the clearings, blacksmiths were busy at their anvils, corn was ground in windmills, on Sundays all paid willing heed to the summons of the church bell.

There is good ground for the conjecture that *Maelduib* was one of the monks who shared *Carthach*’s expulsion from *Rahan*. If so, his migration took place about the same time as *Furse*’s, also while Pope *Honorius* was entrusting *Birin* with his fruitful mission and persuading the churches of southern Ireland to abandon their obsolete reckoning of *Easter*. The hermit soon began to relieve his penury by taking pupils; the ruins of *Caer Bladon* and the trees of the forest supplied building materials for his

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monastic school and for a small basilica dedicated to St Michael.

In the year 652 king Cenwealh defeated the Welsh at Bradford-on-Avon and added to Wessex a wedge of land, the base of which is a line drawn from Penselwood to Wells and its apex near Cricklade. Maelduib seems to have been duly honoured by the conquerors, for they named his fortified precinct Maeldubeshurh, which is now spelt Malmesbury. That wedge of land, the northern end of Selwood Forest, has fitly been called the land of Malmesbury. To the learned abbot was then entrusted a young scion of the royal stock of Wessex, whom he doubtless called Mallem, M standing for the affectionate Mo or My. The boy's full name was Ealdhelm. In one of his extant letters, splitting the word into its two syllables, he calls himself the *old helmet* that protects. His father's name was Kenten; in the eccentric luxuriance of his Latinity he so far outshines even Gildas that his mother was probably Welsh. Maelduib can hardly have had a merrier, wittier or more industrious pupil. Agilbert was then bishop of Dorchester and probably formed an intimate friendship with the only man in his diocese who was as learned as himself. Thus he also may well have been one of Aldhelm's teachers. If, as may fairly be presumed, Lismore, the second foundation of Carthach, was one of the monasteries in which Agilbert had studied, epistolary intercourse maintained by Maelduib with old comrades may have been the cause of his entry into Wessex.

In the year 658, after he had taken by storm the twin hill fortresses of Cadbury and Sutton, near Penselwood, Cenwealh drove his Welsh foes across the river Parrett. The name Sigwell, meaning well of victory, is a local memorial of that eventful campaign. Then followed the peaceful penetration of Exe Vale by the conquerors, which gradually isolated Dorset from the other shires of West Wales. During the fourteen remaining years of his reign

Cenwealh was fully occupied in protecting his realm against the restless ambition of Wulfhere. In the year 661 that king defeated him at Pontisbury, near Shrewsbury, ravaged Wessex as far as Ashdown, thence passed southward and seized the Isle of Wight, together with the Meon district of Hampshire. From the approximate coincidence of this disastrous campaign with Agilbert's departure we may perhaps infer that the division of his diocese was not the only cause of his discontent.

Aldhelm was one of Hadrian's first pupils at Canterbury and probably removed thither in the spring or summer of 671. Among his new comrades was Brihtwald, who afterwards became abbot of Reculver and archbishop of Canterbury. His four years of study there were broken by an interval and ended by an illness which drove him home. In an affectionate letter to that abbot, written about three years later, he specifies, among the hindrances that had kept them so long apart, a fresh attack of the same ailment, which 'parches to the very marrow my wasting limbs.' Such distressing symptoms may have been partly due to his cold bathing in the fountain which still bears his name. So ruthless was he, says William of Malmesbury, to his rebellious body that neither winter frost nor the mist that rose in summer from the marshes deterred him from standing there, shoulder deep, till he had, like Kentigern and other Keltic prodigies of austerity, chanted the Psalter from beginning to end. His conscious life was wholly given to God, being divided between reading such prayers as were fit for the ears of God and eager listening for the answer of His voice. He ate no more than enough to maintain the ceaseless activity of his body and mind. For money he cared naught and kept all that was given him only until he could spend it usefully. If William and Faricius have told the truth, his chastity was rather aggressive than defensive. Whenever a damsel, as fearless as himself, shared with him board or bed, their joint psalmody filled with

dismay the Devil they were thus mocking. His elaborate expositions, both in prose and verse, of the surpassing bliss that always falls to the lot of the unwedded, could not, justly claims William, have been written by a man who failed to practise what he preached. Moreover, in his letter to Wihtfrith, who had put himself to school in Ireland, he strongly warns his young friend against the love-tales of Greek mythology and the society of people who live loosely. In a minor key, he advises him to prefer the hospitality of a humble cottage to that of a splendid palace, and to wear, for protection against the chill blasts of the northern climate, not a costly purple robe but a graceful cassock lined with coarse fur.

Aldhelm's prose treatise, *De Laudibus Virginitatis sive de Virginitate Sanctorum*, displays familiarity with all the Christian biographies that had been written before his time. Of the ten nuns to whom it is addressed six were content with their English names; the others had assumed the names, Justina, Scholastica, Eulalia, Thecla, of virgin saints whom they desired to emulate. First in the list stands Hildelith, abbess of Barking; third Cuthburh, wife of Aldfrith and foundress of Wimborne; fourth Osburh, a kinswoman of Aldhelm. From his compliments to them on their learning, scientific as well as biblical and literary, it appears that in such convents as Barking, during Beda's lifetime, every one of his works must have been heartily welcomed and fully appreciated. After an elaborate comparison of nuns to bees Aldhelm pours forth a flood of somewhat stilted eloquence in praise of virginity, but warns his readers against the error of imagining that chastity is the only virtue they need practise. The rest of the work, three-fourths of the whole, extols thirty-six men, from Elijah onwards, who have been conspicuous patterns thereof, and twenty-four women, beginning with the Virgin Mary.

The hexameter poem, *De Laudibus Virginum*, covers nearly the same ground and is of later date. Both works were

written in Theodore's lifetime, but perhaps not many years before his death. This one begins with an elaborate double acrostic; the hexameter verse,

Metrica tirones nunc promant carmina castos  
is formed by reading downwards the initial letters of each line and the finals upwards.

Aldhelm wrote also a hexameter poem, *De Octo Principalibus Vitiis*. These principal vices are: (1) Unchastity, (2) Gluttony and Drunkenness, (3) Greed of Gain, (4) Discord, (5) Melancholy, (6) the spiritual slothfulness called Akedia, (7) Vainglory, (8) Pride.

'Aldhelm's style,' truly says Montague James, 'recalls the intricate ornamentation of the Keltic manuscripts of the time. The thought is simple, as are the ingredients of the patterns in the manuscripts; but it is involved in exhausting periods, and wonderful words are dotted about in them like spangles. To some scholars of that age, learning meant chiefly the knowledge of strange words. Aldhelm shares the delusion.'

Like a house without cupboards, his mind was littered with reminiscences of omnivorous reading which seem to be always blocking his way; but so stately is the swing of his prose that it cannot have been written altogether at random. By far the least restrained and most puzzling of his extant letters was written to Eahfrith, who had lately completed six years of study in Ireland and was therefore, perhaps, well qualified to appreciate such a violent ebullition. The pith of the letter is the superiority of Theodore and Hadrian to the most learned Scots.

CHAPTER XVIII  
COLMAN OF LINDISFARNE, INISBOFFIN AND  
MAYO

*περισσότερως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων.*  
Gal. i, 14.

**H**E was the third and last bishop given by Iona to Northumbria. The abbot who chose him was called Cummian the Fair. His predecessor Finan had left him a legacy of strife in reference to the reckoning of Easter. During the ten years that had passed since Aidan's death the influence of James the Deacon, of queen Eanfled, her chaplain Romanus and her Kentish companions, of Benedict Biscop, Alhfrith and Wilfrith, had won the adherence of many, especially in Deira, to the catholic reckoning. A Scot named Ronan who had, in Gaul or Italy, become fully convinced, actively supported them and found nearly everybody but Finan ready to listen to his arguments. By severely upbraiding the zealous bishop this eager disputant merely embittered his opposition.

As though the moon herself had become an arbiter in the controversy, the Scotie rule failed so miserably in the years 655 and 658 that the catholics may well have pointed the finger of scorn at their obstinate opponents. One full moon fell earlier than March 25, the erroneous Scotie equinox, and the Sunday belonging to the next fell later than April 21, the extreme Scotie date. In both years, therefore, the more conservative Scots treated XXI moon as Easter Day, though XX was their extreme lunar limit. The date in the former year was March 29, a week later than the catholic; in the latter March 25, three weeks earlier.

The reckoning here called Scotie, with lunar limits XIV and XX, appears in the official records of the Roman Church

during the thirty years from 312 to 342. It was adopted in 314 by the Council of Arles, whose first canon ordered that the date of Easter should be everywhere the same, and was brought into the British Isles by the three British bishops who attended that council. The reckoning here called catholic was devised in the year 525 by Denis the Little, who also introduced the era now called Christian. His first cycle of ninety-five years ended in 626, the second in 721, when Beda had become so recognized a master of chronology that his authority soon made that Dionysian reckoning universal. Its lunar limits are XV and XXI. Another reckoning, the Victorian, recognizing alternative lunar limits XVI and XXII, long held its ground in Gaul, the land of its author, and was adopted, through a misunderstanding, by the churches of Southern Ireland in or about the year 638. Their intention was to conform to the catholic Easter, which, as their envoys discovered at Rome, sometimes preceded the Scotie by three or four weeks.

Among the more thoughtful and earnest of the new converts there was much searching of heart and vague dread lest, though nominally Christians, they might, while thus at odds with one another, be forfeiting the reward of their faith. Oswiu's training had made him so thorough a Scot in thought and speech that he regarded Iona as the home of all sound doctrine; but his loyalty to his teachers had long been an apple of discord in his home and might be carried too far if it fanned into flame the smouldering rivalry between Deira and Bernicia. He was also, perhaps, still trying to conciliate the subjects of murdered Oswini. Among the many Northumbrians who had during his reign put themselves to school in Ireland was one named Tuda. Not long after Colman's consecration he returned thence a fully fledged bishop, wearing the coronal tonsure and, in regard to Easter, like the southern Scots his teachers, a convinced Catholic. He lost no time in setting to work under Colman's orders and became, to all he met, by



example as well as by precept, an active promoter of the Christian faith. The catholic party was further reinforced by bishop Agilbert, who brought with him a priest named Agatho, probably his own chaplain. In accordance with his advice a conference to discuss the question was held at Whitby, in the monastery of Hild, early in the year 664. Thither came Colman with his clergy, Oswiu and Alhfrith, Agilbert and Agatho, Wilfrith, James and Romanus. Though it was a purely Northumbrian gathering, bishop Cedd was also present as abbot of Lastingham. He sided with Colman; so did Hild and her double family. Oswiu presided and opened the proceedings with an earnest plea for uniformity. 'We who serve one God,' he urged, 'ought to keep one rule of life. Whichever tradition therefore proves on inquiry to be the truer ought to be accepted by us all.' He then bade Colman state the source from which his rule was derived. As that bishop had not learnt, well enough to speak it fluently, the language of his flock, his speeches were interpreted by Cedd, who knew Gaelic well enough; but Colman was probably no less fluent in Latin. 'My reckoning of Easter,' quoth he, 'is derived from my seniors who sent me hither as bishop. All the world knows that none of our fathers used any other reckoning, and that they stood high in God's favour. The same reckoning was, as we read, used by John the Evangelist, the disciple who was especially dear to our Lord, and by all the churches which John ruled. Who, then, dares to despise or blame it?'

Agilbert, the senior member in rank of the catholic party and a stranger to local feuds, was next ordered by Oswiu to declare the source of the catholic custom and the authority by which it was supported. 'Instead of me,' deftly pleaded that bishop in excuse, 'pray let my pupil, the priest Wilfrith, speak; he and I are of one mind with the other observers of Church tradition who are sitting here; he can better and more clearly explain our views in English than I could by an interpreter.' Thus, by a master-

stroke of tactics, the Scotie custom was, at the outset of the debate, made to seem foreign.

In obedience to Oswiu, Wilfrith, as reported by Beda, thus began:

‘ Our Easter we saw kept by everybody at Rome, where the blessed apostles Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered and lie buried; by everybody in Italy and Gaul, as we travelled through those countries, learning and praying. We have, moreover, ascertained that it is also the Easter of Africa, Asia, Egypt and Greece; of the whole world, in fact, whithersoever the Church of Christ has spread, the Easter of every tribe and every tongue, except only these Scots and their partners in frowardness, I mean the Picts and Britons. Though they inhabit part only of the two islands that fringe the ocean on the edge of the earth they foolishly waste their strength in fighting against the whole world.’

That, with so good a case, Wilfrith could not refrain from being rude to his opponents shows the darker side of his character. His youth and his obligation to his former teachers intensified the rudeness. But worse followed. After he had clearly shown the difference between the customs of St John and the Scots, his opponent cited Columkille as a man of such undoubted holiness and spiritual power that he must surely be a safe guide. This renewed appeal to authority Wilfrith might have met by merely showing that Columkille was, through no fault of his own, ignorant of the change of reckoning adopted at Rome for the sake of accuracy; but he preferred to hint that though the founder of Iona had done in the Lord’s name many deeds of power, he might yet be one of those to whom would be spoken, in the Day of Doom, the scathing words, ‘ I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.’ He proceeded as follows, abandoning the above strong argument in favour of a weak one:

‘ However holy was your Columkille, I may call him ours too if he was really a member of Christ; he surely can-

not be set above the most blessed chief apostle, to whom the Lord said: Rock is thy name, and on this rock will I build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it, and to thee will I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.'

The last few words gave Oswiu an opening of which he took full advantage.

O. 'Is it true, Colman, that our Lord said those words to Peter?'

C. 'Quite true.'

O. 'Canst thou produce proof that any such authority was given to thy Columkille?'

C. 'No.'

O. 'Then ye both agree that these words were originally said to Peter and that to him were given by our Lord the keys of the kingdom of heaven?'

C. and W. 'Agreed.'

O. 'This, then, is my last word to you both. He is the doorkeeper whom I am unwilling to gainsay; but, to the best of my knowledge and power, I desire in everything to obey his rules, lest, perchance, when I arrive at the doors of the kingdom, there be none to open for me.'

We may imagine that, as he thus cleverly closed the discussion, a smile of triumph lit up the king's features. Few of Colman's supporters could resist the appeal to their superstitious dread. A large majority not only of those who had been summoned to the conference but of the uninvited bystanders thenceforth preferred the reckoning which had become catholic. The question of the tonsure was also discussed and decided in favour of the coronal. The Scotie monks, like the Druids, shaved the head in front of a line drawn from ear to ear.

Stung to the quick by Wilfrith's brutally insolent language, Colman remained steadfastly loyal to the tradition of his elders but bowed to the adverse decision by returning to Iona, in order, as he explained to the king, to confer with his friends there how he ought to behave. With him

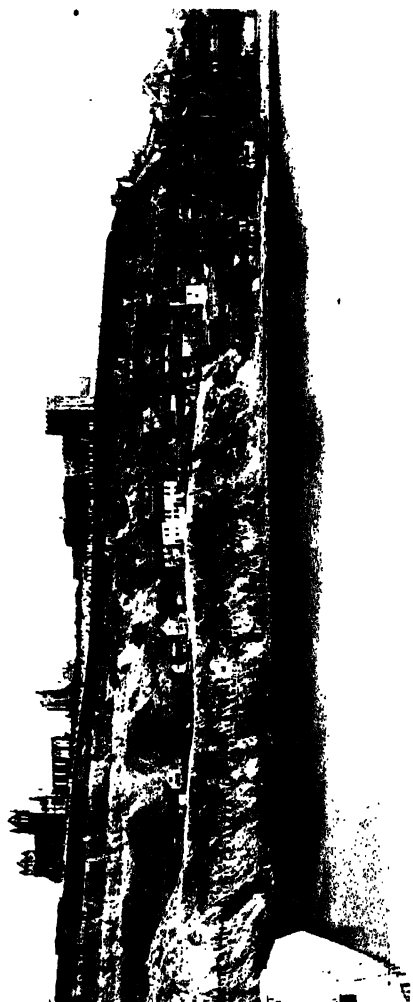
went, of the Lindisfarne brethren, not only all the Scots but also thirty Angles. None but a true spiritual father could have won such devoted affection from men of alien race and speech. The Scotie mission to Northumbria had lasted just one generation when it thus came to an untimely end. The islet which those missionaries had hallowed bore silent witness to their complete subjugation of the flesh. Besides Finan's Church, built of hewn oak and roofed with a rush thatch which also covered the walls by reaching to the ground, there stood only such buildings of the rudest type as were sufficient for the barest needs of the brotherhood. No form of wealth had they but cattle; gifts of money received from the rich quickly slipped through their fingers into the hands of the poor. The great folk of the world outside came, if they came at all, only to pray in the church and to hear the Word of God. No need therefore had the abbot of a guest-house or well-filled purse. At a crisis in affairs of state the king himself used to come, attended by five or six thanes, to sit like David before the Lord. When he had in the church fully unburdened his heavily laden soul and found complete refreshment for his weary spirit, he was ready to depart. If perchance they stayed for a meal, they wanted nothing better than the plain daily fare of the brethren. Such whole-hearted service of God won high esteem for the hooded cothal or cloak of the travelling monk; wherever he went a glad welcome awaited him on his arrival at a lonely homestead. The people he met on the highway ran and bowed the head to be signed with the cross by his hand, while his lips uttered a blessing; to his words of spiritual counsel they lent an attentive ear. On Sundays men vied with one another in crowds to be first at church and hear discourse of God. Whenever a priest arrived at a village the assembled peasants eagerly sought to learn from him the simple secret of his joyous life. In those days none of the clergy had any other motive for tramping from place to place than his desire to preach, baptize, visit the

sick and minister to all the needs of every soul. So completely had they purged themselves from all taint of greed that only with extreme reluctance did they, even for building monasteries, accept grants of land and endowments.

On May 1 of that year, about four in the afternoon, a total eclipse of the sun filled Britain with dread of coming woe. Early in the summer the bubonic plague broke out more fiercely than ever in the south and spread northward into Bernicia, dealing grim death far and wide. On the same day, July 14, the king of Kent and the archbishop of Canterbury, Earconberht and Frithona Deusdedit, were both slain. Later in the year Cedd and Tuda shared their fate.

Colman's wise forethought was a leading feature of his character and had endeared him to Oswiu, who must have been very sorry to lose so trusty a counsellor. In order that the few Angle brethren who chose to stay in Lindisfarne might have a sympathetic ruler, he obtained from the king as a parting boon the appointment of Eata as their abbot. At Iona he spent four years, and may, in the interest of the founder's reputation, so grossly assailed by Wilfrith, have asked abbot Cummian to write the life of that saint which was afterwards expanded by abbot Adamnan. Thence Colman and his too faithful followers made their way to the far west of Ireland, taking with them the share of Aidan's bones which they had brought from Lindisfarne.

About six miles from Renvyle Point, in the Joyce district of Connaught, lies a bare and desolate island called Inisboffin (Inis-bou-finde), from the spectral White Heifer by which it was believed to be haunted. On that island they settled, building themselves an oratory and cells, but did not long dwell together in unity. In the late summer, when the harvest grew ripe for the sickle, the Scots used to leave the labour of reaping to the Angles and wander away on the mainland, each through the old familiar scenes of his boyhood. When winter set in they used to return and claim



THE ABBEY, WHITBY



their share of the provisions which the Angles had gathered and stored. Distressed by the consequent dissension, gentle and patient Colman searched far and near on the mainland till he found a fit site for another monastery. With noble generosity he himself paid for it the price demanded by the owner, who stipulated that the resident monks should also give him the benefit of their prayers. The seller and all his neighbours then helped Colman to build there a new monastery, into which, as soon as it was ready, the Angles moved, leaving Inisboffin to the Scots. The place was called Magh-co, which means Plain of Yews. The colony was so abundantly recruited from England that even as lately as the year 1468 it was described as Mayo of the Saxons. Like the other monasteries of northern Ireland, it adopted, early in the eighth century, under the influence of Adamnan, the catholic reckoning of Easter.

Six or seven years after Colman's departure the first visitation of his province brought the venerable archbishop Theodore of Tarsus to Lindisfarne. He set his seal, as it were, to the Whitby decision by dedicating Finan's Church to St Peter. His companion, abbot Hadrian, presented to the monastery a copy of the Vulgate which he had brought with him from his own monastery at Naples. Not only the text of that copy but the festivals of the Church of Naples are consequently preserved in the famous Lindisfarne Gospels. The hosts of these distinguished guests were abbot Eata and prior Cuthbert.

On August 8, 674, Colman died at Inisboffin. His opponent Agilbert returned to Gaul after the conference and found a home in the double monastery of Jouarre, which had been established in the year 634 by two disciples of Columban, Ado and his brother Dado. Late in the year 666 he became Bishop of Paris. In 670 he was invited by Cenwealh to return to Wessex, but sent instead his nephew Lothair, who was consecrated bishop by Theodore. Agilbert died on October 11, 680, six weeks before Hild.



CHAPTER XIX  
DAUGHTERS OF ANNA  
(SYRE, AUBERGE, SEXBURH, AWDRY, WITBURH)

King's daughters are among thy favourites.

Psalm xlv, 10.

**O**F Anna the Uffing we know that his father Eni was a brother of Radwald and may therefore, like Radwald, have been converted and baptized in Kent while Albert was king. It may fairly be assumed that Anna himself was a pupil in the Christian school established by bishop Felix and endowed by king Sigeberht the Learned; but the first recorded event of his life is his election to the kingship of East Anglia after Sigeberht and Ecgric had been defeated and slain by Penda. No date is assigned to this event in the Chronicle and the date, 637, given in the Book of Ely can be reconciled neither with the overlordship of Oswald, nor with reliable dates in the life of Fursey, nor with expressions used by Beda about the duration of Sigeberht's reign and retirement. Either 643 or 644 well fits the facts. This nephew of unstable Radwald was, according to Beda, a devout and exemplary Christian, uniformly excellent in purpose and achievement, happy also in the goodness and holiness of his offspring, all of whom were baptized by Felix. His wife's name was Sewar. That he was her second husband appears from the fact that he had a stepdaughter named Saethryth, whose merit, like Bathild's, so outweighed her alien birth that she became abbess of Faremoutier-en-Brie, that is Faræ Monasterium in Brige, the famous child of Luxeuil. In France she is venerated as St Syre. Her successor, Anna's own daughter Athelburh, is venerated in France as St Auberge and was in her turn succeeded by their niece

Earcongot. In like manner the first three abbesses of Ely were his daughter Athelthryth, the foundress of the convent; Earcongot's mother Sexburh, the widow of Earconbert, King of Kent; and her sister Ermenild, the widow of Wulfhere king of Mercia. His youngest daughter, Witburh, was first a nun of Ely and then became famous as the ankrass of Dereham. We may imagine how eagerly responsive these brilliant princesses were to the eloquent preaching of Felix and Fursey, and how blithely they and their handmaidens embroidered with nimble fingers splendid fabrics for the adornment of altars and ministering clergy.

Two at least of the five, Athelthryth and Witburh, were keeping pure and fragrant the moral atmosphere of their father's court when the heathen Cenwealh, king of Wessex, fled thither from the wrath of Penda. At the risk of offending his own overlord Anna gave the fugitive a hearty welcome, although he must have known how obstinately, perhaps scornfully, deaf an ear his guest had for a whole decade been turning to the persuasive eloquence of Birin. But the roughest of Saxon warriors had ever been ready to pay almost divine honour to the noblest women of their race; and in presence, we may suppose, of those girls, clad with such radiant beauty of holiness as had never been dreamed of by a son of Woden, the grim features wore a milder look, the harsh voice was subdued to a gentler tone, the soul of Cenwealh began to loathe its own foulness and to long for such cleansing as only the sweet influence of the Holy Spirit can bestow. In due time he was baptized by Felix and led up out of the font by his joyful host. He also married a lady named Sexburh, not to be confounded with the queen of Kent. A year more or less before Cenwealh recovered his kingship the death of that beloved bishop plunged them all into deep mourning. Just then Anna and his family welcomed Hild as their guest and enjoyed her society for a whole year.

Not only Anna but his ealdormen and thanes had already shown their gratitude for the devoted work of Fursey and his comrades by enlarging and endowing their settlement at Cnobheres Burh, pleasantly situated in a forest glade, within view of the sea, on the Suffolk side of the river Waveney. Fursey himself had been driven away, not only by the disaster which placed on Anna's shoulders the burden of kingship, but by his clear foresight that it was only a beginning of troubles. Soon after his death, which happened a year or two later than the death of Felix, an invading force of heathen Angles drove Anna from part at least of his realm, plundered that monastery, captured some of the brethren and scattered the rest. Abbot Foillan, 'kept safe by the right hand of God,' ransomed the captives and sailed away with them to Gaul.

In 654, the year of Anna's defeat and death, Athelthryth had been living for two years among the South Gyrwas of the fenland as the wife of an ealdorman named Tonberht. It was probably she who ordered the burial of her father at Blythburh in Suffolk, near Bulcamp Forest, the traditional scene of the battle, and of her brother Jurmin, who had also been slain, at Bury St Edmunds.

It seems worth while to catch, from the tales told to Jonas of Bobbio by the nuns, such a glimpse as we can of the joys and sorrows shared at Faremoutier by her sister and half-sister. It seems probable that Saethryth was attracted thither by what she heard of the place from Felix, who was doubtless entertained there on his way from Burgundy to East Anglia, and that she afterwards invited Athelburh to join her.

The precinct of the convent was bounded by a rampart, beyond which none might pass; but it sometimes happened that a couple of novices, chafing at the restraint, used a ladder to scale it under cover of night. The rule of Luxeuil seems to have been thoroughly adopted there, and was even amplified by requiring daily confession to be made

thrice instead of twice, after the office of prime as well as before dinner and at bedtime. The younger sisters confessed to the elder, whom they called mothers, but probably revealed only as much as they chose unless they felt sure to find motherly and indulgent sympathy with such stumbles as bruised their upward-striving souls. Of one hapless pair it is recorded that there was never a word of truth in their confessions, whether they were answering questions about their past life in the world or about their daily shortcomings in thought, word or deed. Unable any longer to bear the hollow mockery to which they had thus degraded their life, they fled away on a pitchdark night but were pursued, captured, brought back and urged in vain by the whole community to unbosom their woe. Then, to the dismay of all, they began to shriek, 'Back! Back! Wait awhile!' to a throng of dusky demons whom they saw advancing to seize them. As a last resource, the abbess begged them to confess and fortify themselves with sacramental food. At that word they gnashed their teeth and grinned horribly. Then shrieking 'To-morrow! To-morrow! Back! Back!' they expired. After they had been buried as far as possible from the convent a fiery disc, like a round shield, often appeared above their tombs, especially in Lent and on Christmas Eve. Piteous howling also was heard, above which rang out the cry, 'Woe is me!' When three years had passed since the burial, the abbess opened the tomb and found it scorched with fire. Of the bodies nothing was left but a heap of ashes.

A few of the sisters found their plain and scanty ration of victuals so insufficient that they feasted in secret on a private store of dainties. One such glutton continued the indulgence of her appetite so long that her soul revolted and she began to loathe all food but bran, acorns and vegetable pottage. Another's conscience so scared her during a sharp attack of illness that she made full confession to Mother Fara.

In the garden the nuns themselves grew vegetables for their meals. It is related of one of them named Willesuind, also English, that after she had lived there many years she was at work as usual with others in the garden, suddenly foretold her own speedy departure and soon afterwards fell ill. As she lay abed, joyfully awaiting release, she recited from memory the books of the Bible, beginning with the Pentateuch and ending with the Gospels. She then told the sisters by her bedside that before her departure the Lord would grant her the consolation of knowing that they were rid of a powerful adversary who had presumed to encroach on their land and harass their tenants, namely Ega, the Major Domus or Mayor of the Palace, who had, in January, 639, been appointed by the dying king Dagobert guardian of his infant son, Clovis II, and regent of the kingdom. Surely enough, in that very year, 641, he was, soon after she had spoken, so smitten that he died. Another day, while the bystanders were listening spellbound to her gentle psalmody, Willesuind suddenly ceased to sing and said to one of them:

‘Take thy dirty rubbish outside and throw it away!’

To the others, who asked what she meant, she exclaimed:

‘See ye not that her mind hath not yet been purged, by confession, of the filth which befouled it while she yet lived in the world, before she entered this holy precinct?’

Abashed by the exposure of her secret guilt, the maiden fell prostrate on the floor and made a full confession before her sisters to her dying mother. Willesuind’s last moments were gladdened by a vision of a departed sister named Ansildis, who seemed to summon her heavenward. When she had breathed her last some of the sisters who were walking away from her cell heard the singing of the angels that bore her aloft. At all these touching deathbed scenes both Saethryth and Athelburh may well have been present

Of a sister named Ercantrudis, who had been bred from infancy in the convent, it is related that her patience, piety and gentleness made her a general favourite, but that one of her penances for a breach of rules included excommunication till the penance was over. As the following day was Martinmas she felt the hardship so acutely that she burst into tears. After spending the night in remorseful prayer she felt assured of the Lord's forgiveness and was consequently absolved by the kind abbess in time to receive her share of the housel at the festival mass. During the remainder of her life she broke no rule. Towards the end of her last illness, while she lay almost at her last gasp, she suddenly exclaimed to the watching sisters:

‘ One of you is still so dead in her sins as to be no fit companion for you who have crucified yourselves to the world. Send her away ! ’

Amid the ensuing hubbub one of them came forward, pale and trembling, bowed herself to the ground and meekly confessed that she had been secretly hankering after her old worldly life. After nightfall Ercantrudis begged them to put out the light in her cell and, in answer to the question why, asked:

See ye not the approaching glory ?  
Hear ye not the choirs of singers chanting,  
Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good :  
for His mercy endureth for ever.  
Give thanks to the God of gods :  
for His mercy endureth for ever ?

Then, bidding her mother and mates farewell, she breathed her last with a smile on her lips.

While a sister was ill there was always by night a party of watchers in her cell; but it often happened that many, even all of them, fell into deep slumber. When, for instance, a sister named Bithildis was close to the goal of the long and blameless course on which she had entered in girlhood,

the bell which rang for nocturns roused from sleep all her watchers. Afterwards, as the day dawned, one of them, who had filled the lamp with oil and water, found the liquid apparently changed to milk. All, including the abbess, were thereby sorely puzzled, but at last saw therein a sign from God that, though other watchers fall asleep, the eyes of His mercy are always wide open. As the pure spirit of Bithildis winged its way heavenward her body exhaled a balmy fragrance.

When at last Burgundofara's own hour drew nigh, a high fever seized and prostrated her. One of the sisters, named Gibitrudis, a near kinswoman of the venerable abbess, then prayed earnestly and tearfully in the church that the mother might not depart until she had seen all her daughters safe through the gate of death. She rose from her knees, feeling assured that she at least would not be left behind. Meanwhile Burgundofara had fallen into a trance and seen a vision of the Judge enthroned amid gleaming hosts of angels. From the throne proceeded the stern command:

'Return, for here is no room for thee, who art cherishing resentment against three of thy mates. Freely forgive them and heal their wounds.'

As soon as she was again fully conscious the abbess not only forgave but humbly begged their pardon. She recovered and was presently called to the joyous deathbed of Gibitrudis. Six months after her trance she passed, on December 7, blissfully away, exhaling, like Bithildis, a balmy fragrance. For thirty days and nights her body lay in its coffin on the floor of the church, watched by her spiritual daughters, then was reverently entombed. The year of her death was 657. Her will, made in the year 632, still exists, and shows that a French abbess could then hold and bequeath property of her own. The first three of her successors were Saethryth, Athelburh and Earcongot.

Before Earcongot was old enough to leave her home in

Kent the number of monks at Faremoutier had so increased as to be equal, more or less, to the number of nuns. That such a double monastery would so speedily and naturally develop out of the extension of his rule from a brotherhood to a sisterhood was probably not foreseen by Columban; and the prospect might have startled him. Faremoutier thus became the prototype of Hild's double monastery at Whitby, of Abb's at Coldingham, of Athelthryth's at Ely, of Cuthburh's at Wimborne, and of the monastery founded at Barking by bishop Erkenwald for his sister, another Athelburh. In all of them the abbess held supreme sway over her sons as well as her daughters. The dividing line between the quarters assigned to monks and nuns was never passed except by priests in the exercise of their duty, whether as teachers or celebrants; nor did they linger after their duty was done.

From Beda we learn that when Athelburh was abbess of Faremoutier she began to build there a church in honour of all the apostles, beneath which she desired to be buried; that death snatched her away when it was only half finished; that for the following seven years the brethren were too busy to proceed with it; and that they then abandoned it as too toilsome a task. The obvious inference is that they were less obedient to Earcongot than to her aunt. Athelburh's body was first buried at the spot she had chosen in the unfinished church; then, at the end of the seven years, exhumed and transferred to another church which had lately been built and dedicated to St Stephen the Protomartyr. When they opened the tomb they found her corpse as undecayed as her living body had been chaste. Before the translation the nuns washed the precious relic and wrapped it in fresh napery. The anniversary of the translation, July 7, is the day assigned to Athelburh in the Kalendar of Saints.

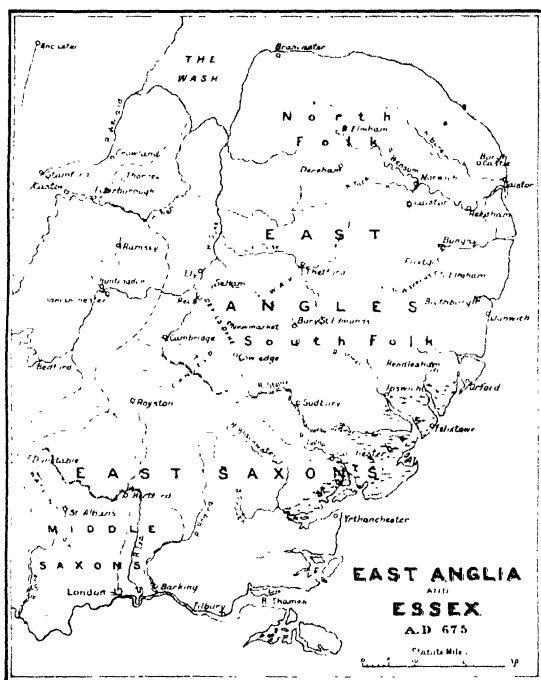
Of Earcongot Beda says that in his time tales were still being told at Faremoutier about her marvellous and mighty



deeds. For us, he continues, 'let it be enough to relate briefly her passage to the realms of heaven. When the day drew nigh on which she was to hear her call, she began to pay a round of visits at the cells of ailing handmaidens of Christ, especially of those who were advanced in age or exemplary in character. Humbly commending herself to the prayers of all, 'It hath been revealed to me,' quoth she, 'that my death is coming very soon. For I saw lately a band of men, clad in white robes, enter our precinct. To my question what they wanted, We have come, they answered, to find and take away with us the golden coin that came hither from Kent.'

As the rosy fingers of dawn began to penetrate the gloom of the following night Earcongot accordingly escaped from the gloom of this present world into the light beyond. In the buildings assigned to the brethren many of them clearly heard, so they afterwards were wont to declare, the swelling chorus of angelic psalmody and the din of a mighty throng filling the monastery. Driven by curiosity out of doors they beheld, shooting from the sky, a blinding column of light, the path up which that holy soul was mounting to the eternal joys of our heavenly home. The other marvels of that memorable night Beda, having as he says other aims in view, left unrecorded. The venerable body of that virgin bride of Christ was buried, like those of her aunts, in the church of St Stephen. Three days later her tombstone was removed to a higher position. During the removal the nostrils of all the bystanders, sisters as well as brethren, were filled with a fragrance so delicious that it might have proceeded from an open treasury of balmy spices. In death Earcongot seems to have shed around her a more sensuous and therefore less real odour of sanctity than in life.





## CHAPTER XX

## MOTHER HILD OF WHITBY

Her price is above rubies.

. . . . .  
Strength and dignity are her clothing.

. . . . .  
She openeth her mouth with wisdom;  
And the law of kindness is on her tongue.

Prov. xxxi, 10, 25, 26.

**A**N elder brother of Edwin, whose name is not recorded and who probably fell in battle, left a son named Hereric, who sought refuge in the forest of Elmet from the enmity of king Athelfrith, his uncle by marriage. His wife Breguswith bore him two daughters, Hereswith and Hild. The younger was born in the year 614, after her father had been poisoned through the treachery of his nominally Christian protector, the Welsh chieftain Ceretic.

In the anguish of her dreams the pregnant widow was constantly seeking the husband who had been so suddenly and tragically snatched away, but saw nowhere any trace of him. Yet was her search rewarded by the vision of a precious necklace beneath her gown, which seemed to shine so brightly that its glory filled every part of Britain. Trusting that the vision was a presage of high destiny awaiting the babe in her womb, no sooner had she given birth to a daughter than she chose for her the name of a Teutonic and Scandinavian war goddess, little guessing the nature of the warfare that would make her famous. Her full name was probably Hildithryth, that is, Strength of Hild.

After his victory at the Idle had restored to Edwin the kingdom of his forefathers, he doubtless became the com-

forter of the two girls and their mother. With him, her great uncle, on Easter Eve, in the year 627, at the age of thirteen, Hild was baptized by Paulin. She may well have already learnt, as the companion of queen Athelburh, the beauty of holiness and the riches of Christ. Very nobly, says Beda, did she spend the next twenty years of her life in the world, but where can only be guessed. Possibly she escaped the horrors of the 'loathsome' year, 634, by fleeing into Wessex with her cousin Oswini, and, nine years later, returned with him to Deira. Possibly also, even probably, she became wife, mother and widow. Her elder sister Hereswith, who was probably also baptized on that memorable day, afterwards married Athelhere the Uffing, bore him a son named Aldwulf, left him in an earlier year than 647 and became a nun in the associated Neustrian double monasteries of Jouarre and Chelles. That, the middle year of her life, Hild spent in East Anglia, intending to follow her sister's example, but was restrained by Aidan from going abroad, accepted from him a hide of land on the north bank of the Wear, and there, with a few companions, began her monastic warfare.

At Heruteu, which means Pool of the Hart, now Hartlepool, a convent was then being ruled by its founder Heiu, the first Northumbrian lady whom that or any bishop had veiled. A year later she became an ankress by retiring to a cell about three miles north of Tadcaster, where is now the village called Healaugh. The name is probably a modification of Heiu Leah or Meadow. In the village cemetery her name has been found on an ancient gravestone. Three miles above Tadcaster the Roman road, Rudgate, crosses the river Wharfe at St Helen's Ford. Close by are St Helen's Well and the Chapel Wood, which took its name from the St Helen's Chapel seen there by Leland. This Helen is doubtless Heiu. Hild became abbess in her stead and ruled that convent for eight years, from 649 till 657.

As administrator and guide Hild was conscientious and

thorough, learning all she could from the elders of Lindisfarne about their system of discipline, and earnestly pondering in her mind the fitness of every detail for the spiritual training of the fair and eager maidens who formed her family. So unerring was her instinctive wisdom, so glowing her desire to serve her Lord and Master, that bishop Aidan and every other venerable monk who enjoyed the honour of her acquaintance visited her as often as they could, and felt overpaid by her uplifting affection for the careful instruction they gave her. Together, listening to the sea which had filled their forefathers with exultation, they doubtless discussed much that went awry in Church and State; and, as they gazed on that great Soother of its own Tumult, felt un unseen Presence soothing the tumult of their souls.

After his victory at Winwidfield king Oswiu fulfilled his vow by entrusting to Hild, rather than to his half-sister Abb, his daughter Alflred, then barely a year old. Among the twelve sites he was then dedicating to monastic uses she probably made her own choice of a stormswept, beetling cliff, rising sheer 300 feet from the sea. Thus did she signify her own loftiness of aim and austerity of soul. The site had never been trodden by man and was covered with bramble thickets. It was also infested with snakes, who so terrified the first novices that they dared not leave their cells even to draw water. Hild's prayer however, so runs the legend, caused those reptiles to issue from their crevices below ground, glide all together over the edge of the cliff and become petrified on the beach below. Some early admirer of Whitby ammonites had clearly a poetic imagination. The place was then called Streoneshealh, Streon being the name of a man who had settled near the mouth of the Esk. The word healh, or haugh, means a nook beside a river and well fits that sheltered creek. The Danish name Whitby is due to the radiant whiteness of the sheltering cliffs. Like Brigid at Kildare, Hild became the ruler of

monks as well as of nuns and taught all the members of her double family to be jealous guardians of every virtue, especially of peace and love. In emulation of the primitive Christians, they banished riches and poverty from their midst by having all things completely in common and never using the word mine. The strong common sense of the practical abbess caused her counsel to be sought by all men, high and low, in every time of distress. So full a channel was she of love and grace that all who knew her called her Mother. Not only did her splendid example sustain her own neighbours, but the fame of her virtuous activity reformed the lives of very many who dwelt far away. Pallas Athene herself, in her lofty Parthenon, can hardly have been more highly honoured.

Even though Hild arrived in East Anglia too late to find Felix alive, she may well have derived from his Burgundian helpers the idea of copying the flourishing double monasteries which had been founded by monks of Luxeuil. At Remiremont, for instance, in the Vosges, the *laus perennis* or perpetual psalmody which Kentigern, as we have seen, established at Llanewy, was maintained by dividing the nuns into seven groups of twelve. By taking turns in the church they chanted the whole Psalter once in every twenty-four hours. A similar custom was observed at Laon, where, about the year 640, under the influence of Waldebert, third abbot of Luxeuil, a lady named Salaberg founded a double monastery and afterwards ruled there no fewer than 800 nuns. As lately as the reign of Charles I their example was followed at Little Gidding by Nicholas Ferrar and his family. It seems therefore highly probable that some such rule was established by Hild at Whitby.

The zeal with which, under Hild's direction, her monks devoted themselves to Bible reading and good works bore fruit in a plentiful supply of efficient clergy. One of them, Bosa, became third bishop of York about two years before her death and was probably recommended by her as the

fittest man to displace Wilfrith. The first bishop of Worcester would have been a monk of Whitby named Tatfrith, whom Beda calls very strenuous, very learned and exceedingly able; but Death snatched him away so soon after his election that he could not be consecrated. Three other monks trained by her became bishops after her death, namely Aetla, the third and last of Dorchester, when that see had become Mercian; Oftfor, the second of Worcester; and John, who, after being second bishop of Hexham, became fourth bishop of York and is famous as John of Beverley. The fifth bishop of York, named like the second Wilfrith, was also trained at Whitby, not under Hild but under her successor Alfed, and then served as priest under John.

That Hild's abbey soon became the chief source of church life in Northumbria also appears from the fact that it was chosen, early in the year 664, as the scene of the important conference which put an end to the unhappy diversity in the reckoning of Easter. That the issues at stake were far deeper, involving a choice between Scotie severity and Roman splendour, appears from the fact that Hild and her family were among Wilfrith's opponents. Unlike Oswiu and all the rest of them, she had been bred in Roman ways and must therefore have deliberately preferred Scotie. We may accordingly regard her as the earliest herald of the Puritan movement which began, nine centuries later, to convulse the nation. Yet, though the insulting tone of Wilfrith's speeches must have filled her with indignation, she was too loyal to her king and folk to place personal feeling above public duty. Her vote rather than the king's probably secured a majority of all classes in favour of the catholic reckoning.

In 674, about a year after Athelthryth became abbess of Ely, Hild began, at the age of sixty, to be sorely tried by wasting fevers, which slowly but steadily wore out her vigorous body. As Beda quaintly puts it, the merciful Planner of our salvation decided to make her strength per-

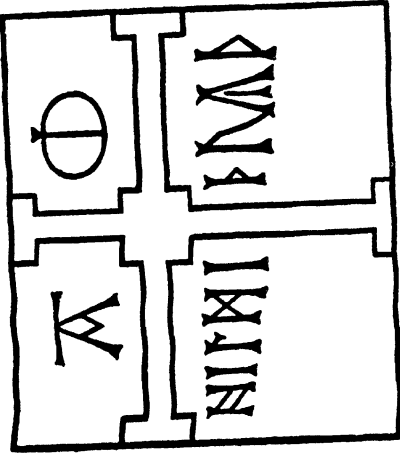
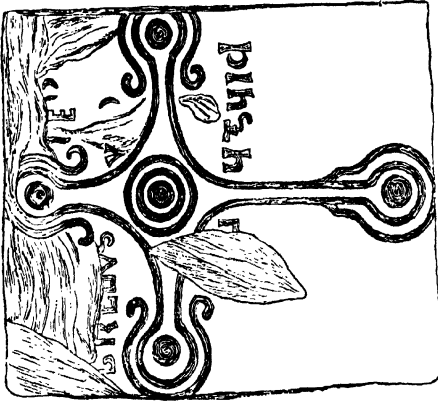


fect in weakness. During the last six years of her life, though in constant pain, she continued nevertheless to manifest her increasing thankfulness to her Creator by teaching, both in public and in private, the flock committed to her charge. Her own example reinforced her exhortation that, as health of body is the Lord's gift and must be used in His service, so in adversity of every kind faithful thanks are always due to Him. In the year 678, after the deposed Wilfrith had started for Rome, her envoys, as well as Theodore's, went thither to plead against him in the papal court. Both king and archbishop must, therefore, have had better motives than personal resentment for deposing that powerful prelate. Very little is recorded of Bosa; but Hild's choice of him far outweighs Wilfrith's detraction.

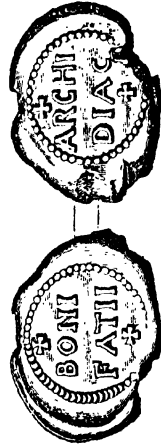
A shifting of pain to her entrails warned Hild that her end was nigh. She therefore summoned those of her spiritual daughters that were dwelling under the same roof and, after they had partaken with her of the housel, bade them live with one another, nay with all mankind, in the peace of the Gospel. At cockcrow on November 17, 680, while she was yet speaking, she gladly welcomed the Angel Death.

To two women who held her dear visions of her passage were vouchsafed. The one, Begu, whose monastic warfare had lasted nearly as long as hers, lay asleep in the dormitory of a convent which had been built by Hild's order, in that very year, at Hackness, thirteen miles away. In her dream Begu heard the familiar knell which bade the nuns assemble to pray for a lately departed sister and saw, as though the roof were removed, the whole sky suffused with light; amid which, as she gazed intently, appeared the soul of Hild being borne heavenward by a train of escorting angels. She awoke suddenly, saw her sister nuns sleeping around her and knew that only the eyes of her mind had been open. Much alarmed, she hastily arose and





TOMBSTONES OF HILDETHURTH AND BREGA-SWITH



BULLA FOUND AT WHITBY

ran to the abbess, whose name was Frigyth. Then, with tears streaming down her cheeks and sighs heaving her breast, she told the wondrous tale. Frigyth aroused the whole sisterhood, summoned them to the church and bade them join her in prayer and psalmody for the soul of their departed mother. Soon after daybreak a party of monks from Whitby brought the mournful tidings, probably on galloping horses, and were surprised to find themselves forestalled. The other seer of the same vision was one of the Whitby novices, who slept in the wing set apart for them. Intense love of the departing abbess had long filled her heart. \*

In the year 1833 the cemetery of the ancient convent of Hartlepool was found in Cross Close, a field which doubtless took its name from the cemetery cross. Beneath the heads of the skeletons were flat inscribed stones. One of the inscriptions had originally been ORATE PRO BREGUSUID. Another, on a much larger stone, consists of A Ω and the name Hildithryth in runes. There can be little doubt that the former marks the grave of Hild's mother; and the probability that the second marks Hild's own grave is confirmed by the fact that the name Hildithryth and not Hild is found in the *Liber Vitæ* of Lindisfarne. Thus also Liobgyth, the famous nun of Wimborne, is better known as Liob.

That Begu is perhaps the saint after whom St Bees Head was thus named. Bracelet is the meaning of her name, and a bracelet plays a prominent part in her famous legend. Before she was veiled by Aidan her home was a lonely cell in Copeland. She died at Hackness, within a year of Hild, on October 31, 681.

## CHAPTER XXI

### WILFRITH ATTAINING

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement. Eccl. xi, 9.

**A**T the beginning of the year 664, before the Whitby Conference, the whole of England, except Kent, East Anglia, Wessex and Sussex, traced to bleak Iona the inspiration of its Christian teachers. Of the four exceptions, Sussex, isolated by forest and marshland, was still heathen; East Anglia and Wessex, as we have seen, owed their Christianity partly to teachers who came direct from Ireland, partly to others who came from the schools established by Columban of Leinster in Burgundy and Lombardy. Kent alone owed allegiance to Rome. During the next half century, throughout England, the arts that please eye and ear enriched the churches and their ceremonial; soaring and self-reliant spiritual freedom gave way to the steady dominion of organized priestcraft. Of this gradual revolution Wilfrith was the most prominent leader. Through evil report and good report, in adversity as well as in prosperity, the versatile powers of his active mind were unceasingly devoted to the task of assimilating English to Roman Christianity in penitential discipline, outward forms and superstitious customs. The very quarrels which caused him to pay two long visits to Rome, to spend many years of his life in Mercia and to become the apostle of Sussex, withered his insular patriotism, puny plant that it was, and widened the range of his influence.

The sudden departure of Colman saddled his coadjutor,

Tuda, with the whole burden of episcopal work in Northumbria; but, smitten by plague, he died, very soon after his election, in that same year, 664. If he had lived his diocese would probably have been limited to Bernicia; for Alhfrith had resolved, with his father's permission, to have Wilfrith consecrated bishop for himself and his own subjects. In consequence of Tuda's death Wilfrith was elected, so Eddi avers, by a full witenagemot bishop for the whole of Northumbria. The date of this election was doubtless later than July 14, the day on which archbishop Frithona Deusdedit died of the plague. Besides the interloper Wini the only bishop in England whose consecration seemed to Wilfrith canonical was Berhtgils Boniface of Dunwich. The canonical number of consecrators was three. Alhfrith therefore sent his friend, magnificently equipped with men and money, to the feckless boy king of Neustria, Chlotchar III, then just beginning to be independent of the beneficent and virtuous queen-mother Bathildis, in order that he might be consecrated by Gallic bishops. In the spring accordingly of 665, if not earlier, twelve bishops, including Agilbert, assembled for the ceremony at the royal town of Compiègne. After the public consecration he was borne to the altar, according to Gallic custom, in a golden chair, which, on this occasion, the bishops alone carried with their own hands, chanting psalms. A canon which had thrice been sanctioned by a Western Council forbade the ordination of a man even to priesthood until he had attained the age of thirty; yet Wilfrith was then no older. The thoroughly congenial pomp and circumstance of which he had become the centre may well have puffed him up with the pride that goeth before a fall. There, as formerly at Lyon, he surrendered himself, month after month, to the charm of his surroundings. None of the Scots he despised would have been so deaf to the call of duty. Not until the spring of 666 did he and his numerous party begin their homeward journey. While they were in mid-Channel a storm arose which cast

them on the coast of heathen Sussex. The ebb left them at the mercy of a gang of wreckers, who prepared to seize the ship, share its cargo as lawful spoil, enslave their prisoners and slay with sword, there and then, any of the crew or passengers who showed fight. Wilfrith spoke them fair and tried to pacify them by promising a large sum of money. 'All is ours,' was the gruff answer, 'that the sea casts up.' On a lofty mound stood their high priest, cursing the doomed party and trying to fetter their hands by magic. A stone truly aimed from a sling smote him, like Goliath, in the forehead, and hushed for ever his weird spells. Both sides then made ready for battle. While Wilfrith and his clergy knelt to pray, with uplifted hands, his armed force, 120 strong, thrice put to flight the heathen rabble, losing only five of their own number. The local sub-king of the South Saxons then brought more men and put himself at the head of the united throng for a fourth onset; but the rising tide was already floating the ship. Having safely embarked, Wilfrith and his party were gently wafted by a south-westerly breeze into the harbour of Sandwich. Strangely, in the ears of the baulked wreckers, sounded across the waves glad chants of thanksgiving.

This narrow escape may well have set Wilfrith to work probing the depths of his own soul and finding there much to shake his overweening conceit of himself. On his arrival in Deira he was further chastened by finding Chad in possession of the see of York and his patron Alhfrith fallen from power into irretrievable disgrace. To us, with our daily delivery of letters and newspapers, it seems hardly credible that neither message nor even rumour of home politics had reached him in Gaul; but this is clearly implied both by Eddi and Beda. Meekly enough, to outward appearance, he resumed his abbacy at Ripon but had not long to wait for episcopal work elsewhere; long enough however to lay to heart, if he would, the justice of the retribution that had thus befallen the supplanter of blameless Eata.

The see of Canterbury was still vacant and destined to remain so till the arrival of Theodore on May 27, 669, fourteen months after he had been consecrated by pope Vitalian. To Ecgberht, king of Kent, the brilliant young bishop who had, fourteen years ago, been for a whole year the welcome guest of his father and mother, must have been no stranger and may well have been an object of reverent affection. In obedience to his summons, Wilfrith spent some time in Kent, ordaining clergy and closely studying the Benedictine rule as it was kept in the cathedral monastery of Canterbury, or in the more important monastery outside the city dedicated to St Peter and St Paul. That rule he afterwards introduced into all the monasteries he founded or controlled. His winning manners and intelligent manifold sympathy with all who were endeavouring to consecrate their faculties of mind or body gathered round him in Kent, as formerly in Gaul, a skilful company of men who followed him home to Ripon and helped him realize, there and elsewhere, his ideals of majestic beauty in public worship. Besides masons, sculptors and other craftsmen there were two masters of antiphonal chanting, one of whom, Stephen Eddi, became Wilfrith's enthusiastic admirer and wrote the classic account of his life. The other's name was Æona.

In the year 667 the archbishop elect of Canterbury travelled to Rome to be consecrated by Vitalian but had hardly delivered his letters and the many gold and silver medals he brought as gifts, when he and most of his companions were smitten by the plague and died. His name was Wighard. As a native of Kent he was doubtless more acceptable to the men of his own tribe than his West Saxon predecessor, under whom he had served as priest. His training he owed to disciples of [pope Gregory. His election was the fruit of much anxious deliberation, led by Oswiu as well as by Ecgberht, and was the first collective act of our national Church; but how the common will was ascer-



tained we know not. By sending him to Rome for consecration they hoped to secure the indisputable catholicity of his own future consecration of bishops. After his death the pope wrote, not to both kings but only to Oswiu, a letter in which, after much fulsome flattery, he promised to send an archbishop as soon as a fit person could be found who was willing to travel so far. In thus taking the choice upon himself Vitalian would seem to Oswiu to be merely following the precedent set by the abbot of Iona, who had thrice chosen a bishop for Northumbria. The bearers of this letter bore also a goodly pile of relics, to assure Oswiu, by tangible tokens of the favour, not only of the apostles Peter and Paul, but of five holy martyrs, a Lawrence, a John, a Paul, Gregory the Great and Pancras. To queen Eanfled they brought a cross made, at least partly, from the reputed chains of St Peter and St Paul, together with a golden key.

In that same year, 667, a wide and effectual door was opened to Wilfrith, in Mercia as well as in Kent, by the death of bishop Jaruman. King Wulfhere not only often invited him to perform various episcopal duties, but, 'for the healing of his own soul,' granted him many sites for monasteries. Among them was Oundle, where he was destined, at the ripe age of seventy-five, to bring his weary pilgrimage to a peaceful end.

On his way from Rome to Canterbury Theodore tarried long in Paris with Wilfrith's partisan Agilbert, then bishop of that see; in Kent he doubtless heard much praise of Wilfrith's work there. He consequently arrived at York, in the summer of 669, so doubly prejudiced in the young man's favour that he was ready to gratify the Roman party by deposing the supplanter Chad, and putting in possession of the see the bishop who had, five years ago, been duly elected, and, a few months later, duly consecrated. Many Northumbrian believers who had begun to value Christlike simplicity of life must nevertheless have been annoyed by the change.

In the course of the seventh century the episcopate of Gaul was infected by the same anarchical corruption as the civil aristocracy. Metropolitans lost all their authority, inferior clergy all salutary influence; bishops were rather domineering landlords than sympathetic pastors. The number of provincial synods dwindled from fifty-four in the sixth century to twenty in the seventh; and papal authority was set at naught. Every bishop was despotic within his own diocese; he owed his rank to the choice, neither of the local clergy nor laity, but to the favour of some vicious king. Against restive subordinates he strengthened himself by conferring holy orders rather on slaves than on freemen. His exclusive control of all church revenue, whether from land or from offertories, tended to make him oppressive and ostentatious. In the year 646 a synod held at Toledo found it necessary to decree that no bishop, going the round of his diocese, should be chargeable to any one through the excessive number of his servants, nor take with him more than five carriages. Such were the prelates whom Wilfrith met during the five years he sojourned in Gaul and from whose example, as will appear in the sequel, he did not sufficiently recoil.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE FOUNDERS OF WEARMOUTH (BENEDICT BISCOP AND CEOLFRITH)

And everyone that hath left houses or brethren or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake shall receive a hundredfold and shall inherit eternal life. Matt. xix, 29.

**S**O runs the text of Beda's homily on his departed teacher. Of the word hundredfold he says that it is to be taken not literally, but symbolically, as denoting the perfect universality in mutual service of Christian brotherhood. He saw a particular fulfilment of the promise in the cordial hospitality that awaited a travelling monk in every monastery on his route.

For the childhood of Biscop, whose father's name was also Beda, his eminent pupil could find no fitter words than were applied by Gregory the Great to the equally great Benedict of Monte Cassino, that in the boy's body beat the heart of ripe old age, animated by a character steady beyond his years and a mind that soared above self-indulgence. He belonged to the royal stock of the Lindiswara and is placed by his pedigree in the seventh generation from Woden. His patronymic Baducing seems to be derived from a longer form of his father's name. He had a brother, who is said to have been 'very far removed from him by poverty of heart' and perhaps never even professed the Christian faith. His early manhood was spent in the bodyguard of Oswiu during the perilous opening years of that king's reign. Not long after the murder of Oswini and the death of Aidan, he gave back the lands he had received as his due reward and entered on the warfare which seeks no earthly recompense. When, in the summer

of 658, at the age of twenty-five, he sailed away from Kent, taking Wilfrith with him, Biscop had no thought of returning to the land where he was nevertheless destined to train for Christ a family of sons who, as Beda puts it, being spiritual, would be his not, like ordinary sons, for a lifetime, but for ever and ever.

On his arrival in Rome he first gratified his longing to pay homage to both great apostles at their tombs, then yielded to the fascination of the stately and elaborate ritual which dignified the daily round of prayer and praise in the seven splendidly adorned churches. After a while, generously eager to share with his folk all he had learnt, he returned to his native country and, for nearly ten years, zealously and unceasingly commended to as many as he could the catholic liturgy and discipline. Beda is lavish of graceful rhetoric but omits to tell us where his hero then dwelt or whether he had been ordained. As he is not named among those who were present at the Whitby Conference we may perhaps infer that he took up in Lindsey, the land of his forefathers, the broken threads of Paulin's work. He became acquainted with Alhfrith and undertook to escort him to Rome; but, after that prince had been forbidden by his father to go, Biscop went thither alone and spent there a few months of the year 665, taking delight as before in deep draughts of healthful doctrine. Thence he departed to Lérins, took vows in the famous monastery and received the coronal tonsure from abbot AYGulf, who had lately adopted the Benedictine rule. Then, probably, he first assumed the name Benedict, in token of thankfulness for the grace bestowed on him. After he had for two years diligently kept his vows and become familiar with every department of monastic life, he was, as Beda puts it, overcome by his devotion to the blessed Chief Apostle and therefore decided to return to the city that was hallowed by the body of that local deity. Thither he sailed in the first merchantman that came along. Perhaps also, like the Bur-

gundian Attala seventy years earlier, he was disgusted with the laxness of discipline among the brethren of Lérins. So high a reputation had he won for wisdom and holiness that he was appointed by pope Vitalian not only guide of archbishop Theodore to his destination but also his interpreter during the interval that must elapse before Theodore could speak English. As before, only the perception of a higher duty brought Biscop's pilgrimage to an end.

Chief among the companions of Theodore was Hadrian, an African by birth, who had been abbot of a monastery not far from Naples, and to whom, on the death of Wighard, the archbishopric of Canterbury had first been offered. Though he was well equipped with scriptural and ecclesiastical lore, highly skilled also in Greek as well as Latin, he deemed himself unworthy of so high an office and proposed instead a monk named Andrew, who acted as chaplain to a neighbouring convent of nuns and was deemed by all who knew him well qualified both by age and learning. He was however too heavily burdened by illhealth. Again urged to undertake the task, Hadrian found, after a while, in November, 667, another substitute, also a monk, a native of the same city as the Apostle Paul. His Greek and Latin scholarship had made him familiar with the whole range of western literature, classical as well as theological. His high reputation as a philosopher seems to have unreasonably scared the pope. Theodore's age was sixty-six and his moral record clean. Like other Greek monks he kept his head quite bald, following, as he believed, the fashion set by St Paul. Vitalian accepted him and either conceded or stipulated that Hadrian should be his companion. The humble-hearted abbot had already twice travelled in Gaul over the greater part of their route and had sufficient men of his own to form an escort. He was afterwards to help Theodore in the work of teaching and to be watchful lest, after the manner of Greeks, he might bring into the Church of England taught contrary to the true

faith. No pope could help regarding Greek Christendom as the hotbed of heresy; and, even if Theodore were not a monothelete, he might become a new heresiarch. He was first ordained subdeacon, then waited four months to let his hair grow long enough to receive the coronal tonsure. At last, on Sunday, March 26, 668, he was duly consecrated by Vitalian in a ceremony which gave a fresh starting-point to the almost extinct English episcopate. The consecrator prayed that whatever beauty of character had been typified by the gold and gems and many colours of Aaron's robes might shine forth in Theodore: abundant and constant faith, pure love, genuine pursuit of peace.

For some unexplained reason two more months elapsed before the party left Rome. They went by sea to Marseilles and thence overland to Arles. After they had presented to John, the archbishop of that city, their commendatory letters, he detained them until Ebroin, ever on the alert, had given leave to proceed. Theodore and Benedict Biscop were kindly welcomed at Paris by Agilbert, then bishop of that see, and wintered there; Hadrian made his way to Sens, the see of archbishop Emme, and afterwards to Meaux, the see of the aged bishop Faro, who cherished affectionate memory both of Columban and of his own sister, the foundress of Faremoutier. By both the learned abbot was hospitably entertained. He probably spent the winter in Faro's monastery outside the city. In that season the wayfarers could not prudently continue their journey. As soon as king Ecgberht learnt from trustworthy messengers that the long-expected archbishop was actually in the realm of the Franks, he forthwith sent his reeve Radfrith to escort him. At Etaples they were detained for a time by Theodore's illness, and Hadrian even longer, till Ebroin felt assured that he had not a secret mission, hostile to the Franks, from Constans to the English kings. That ferocious and vicious emperor had, in the year 663, fled to Rome from the hatred of his Eastern subjects. To the

great relief of both Pope and citizens he passed on thence to Sicily, where, before the end of 668, a slave murdered him in his bath.

Theodore arrived at Canterbury on Sunday, May 27, 669, a year and a day after his departure from Rome; and immediately appointed Benedict Biscop to the vacant abbacy of the monastery which Austin had dedicated to St Peter and St Paul. The appointment was only temporary because, in obedience to the order of the Pope, he had bestowed that place on Hadrian and his companions; but he had also resolved to take Hadrian with him in his first visitation of his widely scattered flock. Everywhere they found a glad welcome awaiting them. The ready obedience then for the first time yielded to an archbishop by all English Christians was the germ of national unity. They soon gathered a band of eager disciples into whose minds they daily poured fertilizing streams of sound learning, which included grammar, metrecraft or prosody, stargcraft or astronomy, and the method of determining the date of Easter. Half a century later some of them were still alive who knew Latin and Greek as well as their mother tongue. Never since the Angles invaded Britain, exclaims Beda, looking back to his earliest years, had there been happier times. Brave Christian kings overawed the Welsh and Picts; all men earnestly sought the lately revealed joys of the kingdom of heaven; masters were ready to teach every willing learner. The Roman church music also, which had hitherto been almost confined to Kent, was then beginning to spread throughout England.

In the spring of 671 Biscop was relieved by Hadrian of the charge of his monastery, promptly started again for Rome and had, as usual, a prosperous journey. His long intercourse with two such learned veterans had filled him with ardent thirst for knowledge. The main object, therefore, of his third pilgrimage was the collection of theological books. Of the many he collected in Rome some were

bought, others given him by generous friends. On his homeward journey he received at Vienne another lot, bought through the agency of friends who dwelt there. When he had again crossed the straits he thought it his duty to betake himself, with his precious load, to Cenwealh of Wessex, who had formerly befriended and helped him. It is remarkable that a king who had been obstinately deaf to Birin, and had quarrelled with two of his own bishops, should have thus attracted the most high-minded of English benedictines. But he had already, in that very year, 672, been claimed by Death. Biscop therefore turned once more northward to his native land, found the lately enthroned Ecgfrith and told him, in glowing words, the whole moving tale of his doings in the score of years that had passed since he started on his first pilgrimage. Deserted by his wife and at odds with his bishop, the young king showed by his generous response to this appeal how welcome was a visitor that promised to be a sure and safe spiritual guide.

On seventy hides, not of the national folkland nor of land filched from his nobles, but of his own bocland, he bade Biscop build a monastery in honour of 'the first shepherd of the Church.' Little did either of them foresee how soon the site, on the left bank of the silent Wear, would become the chief seat of learning and piety not only in England but in Western Europe.

The monastery of St Peter was founded at Wearmouth in 674. A year later, desiring to make the abbey church worthy of that apostle, Biscop crossed over to Gaul in search of skilled stonemasons. In finding them he was actively helped by an abbot named Tortelm, who had long been linked to him in bonds of friendship. No sooner were they found than he brought them home. So heartily did they work for their eager master that within a year of laying the foundations mass was chanted beneath the finished roof of the stately basilica, built in the Roman style he



loved. Meanwhile Biscop had sent for Frankish glaziers, the first seen in Britain, to glaze the windows of church, cloisters and refectory. They also taught the Angles not only their windowcraft but also the art of making glass vessels. As he could find in England nothing good enough for the ornate equipment of church, altar and ministers, the founder imported from abroad many beautiful works of ecclesiastical art. The rule he established was eclectic, based on what he had learnt by visiting seventeen very ancient monasteries of Gaul and Italy. All the best customs he saw were pouched in his mind till he had a family of his own. Essentially his rule was, of course, Benedictine; but it probably owed something to the rule established by Columban at Luxeuil and Bobbio. In the monasteries of Gaul these two famous rules had then almost completely coalesced.

One of Biscop's first recruits was his cousin Eosterwini, who, like himself, threw up, at the age of twenty-four, his prospects as a thane in the king's bodyguard. Their fathers were a pair of brothers. The younger man had almost certainly tasted the joy of battle in the successful campaigns of Ecgrith against the Picts and Mercians. So far was he from giving himself airs on account of his high rank that from the outset he gaily did his full share of threshing and winnowing, milking and gardening, baking and cooking. His heart was merry, his voice melodious, his disposition generous, his countenance frank and open.

Feeling, like Moses and Barnabas, the need of a companion in his great undertaking, Biscop associated with himself a younger enthusiast named Ceolfrieth, whose earlier life is thus recorded. He was born in 642, the year of Maserfeld, and well trained from infancy by pious parents in the pursuit of virtue. His father stood very high among the companion thanes of Oswiu and found especial delight in showing compassion to the poor. One day, for instance, he had prepared a magnificent banquet for that king, but a sudden raid of Penda's Mercians demanded his guest's pre-

sence elsewhere. He forthwith invited to the tempting board all the hungry folk that dwelt or were travelling in the neighbourhood, and himself waited on the men while his wife waited on the women. In his eighteenth year Ceolfrith doffed his gay clothes and donned the habit of a monk at Gilling, the abbacy of which his brother Cynefrith had lately resigned to their cousin Tunberht, in order that he might himself win higher perfection in Ireland. Soon afterwards, probably in the year 661, a widespread visitation of plague swept away both Cynefrith and other highborn Angles who had preceded him thither; while Tunberht, Ceolfrith and not a few other Gilling brethren accepted Wilfrith's invitation to fill the places left vacant at Ripon by the departure of Eata, Cuthbert and their fellows. Hardly had Wilfrith superseded Chad in the bishopric of York when he ordained Ceolfrith priest, at the early age of twenty-seven. In order to complete his training that young man then visited Kent, doubtless becoming there the pupil of Biscop in his monastery. On his way back to Ripon he spent some time in Lindsey with abbot Botulf, who had, in the year 654, after a thorough training at Faremoutier or some other Columbian house, founded on uncleared ground at Ikanho, a monastery which was the nucleus of Boston (Botulf's town). There, till the closing years of the century, he faithfully tended his flock, winning the love of all men by gentleness and humility. His day in the Kalendar is June 17.

None, avers his admiring biographer, a nameless member of his monastic family, none could in those days be found more learned than Ceolfrith in liturgic or monastic lore; but, unlike some others, he could not be puffed up by pride either of place or of knowledge or of his own high birth. Was the writer of this passage, we may well ask, thinking of Wilfrith, to whom he gives not a word of praise, though he records Botulf's widespread reputation for holiness, learning and spiritual gifts?

While he held the office of baker, sifting meal, heating and cleaning the oven, Ceolfrith was careful to repeat, in order to learn them better, the forms of prayer used by a priest. Afterwards, as master of the school, he superintended with equal zeal both teaching and chastisement. There was in those days no namby-pamby sparing of the rod. Leave to join Biscop was given him by Wilfrith, who seems, as bishop of York, to have kept in his own hands the abbacy of Ripon. During Biscop's absence in Gaul Ceolfrith, as prior of the new monastery, had to cope with high-spirited young nobles, who could not bear the restraint of the rule and bitterly reproached the superior they were bound to obey. Deeply hurt, he resumed his peaceful and lowly place at Ripon, but was recalled thence by Biscop, who followed him thither and made an earnest appeal to his affection. Together they completed the organization of monastic life.

Not even in Gaul had Biscop found all he needed to realize his ideal of a monastery. Early therefore in the year 678 he again set his face Romeward, accompanied by Ceolfrith, who desired to learn more fully than he could in Britain his priestly duties. The care of the monastery during their absence was entrusted to Eosterwini, who was then in priest's orders. On their arrival the pilgrims were received with due honour by the newly consecrated pope Agatho, whom Eddi, or some interpolator of Eddi's text, identifies with the priest of that name who attended the Whitby Conference. A year or more later, having doubtless met the deposed Wilfrith in Rome, they returned, laden, as Beda puts it, with a more manifold treasure of spiritual wares than Biscop had before secured. He is possibly the priest Benedict named among the thirty-five who attended the Council held in October, 679, to discuss the general question of dissension in the English Church.

First among the heap of spoil were countless books of

every kind; second, enough relics of apostles and martyrs to hallow many churches; third, the complete course of antiphonal psalmody used in the churches of Rome and, more important still, the precentor of St Peter's to teach the Roman modes of chanting. His name was John, and he was abbot of St Martin's monastery. In deference doubtless to him the return journey passed through Tours, the home of that saint's wonder-working relics. After his devotees had hospitably entertained the party and exacted from John a promise to visit them again on his way back to Rome, they provided him with a company of helpers.

The fourth boon brought home by Biscop was a letter of privilege for his monastery, the first of its kind that entered Britain, accepted, we are assured, not only with Ecgrith's permission, but at his desire and by his advice. The Pope declared that Wearmouth was to be for ever safe and free from any interference or control whatsoever of external authority, whether royal or episcopal. The privilege was deliberately confirmed by a Northumbrian wite-nagemot, perhaps the very same which flouted the papal pretension to restore Wilfrith.

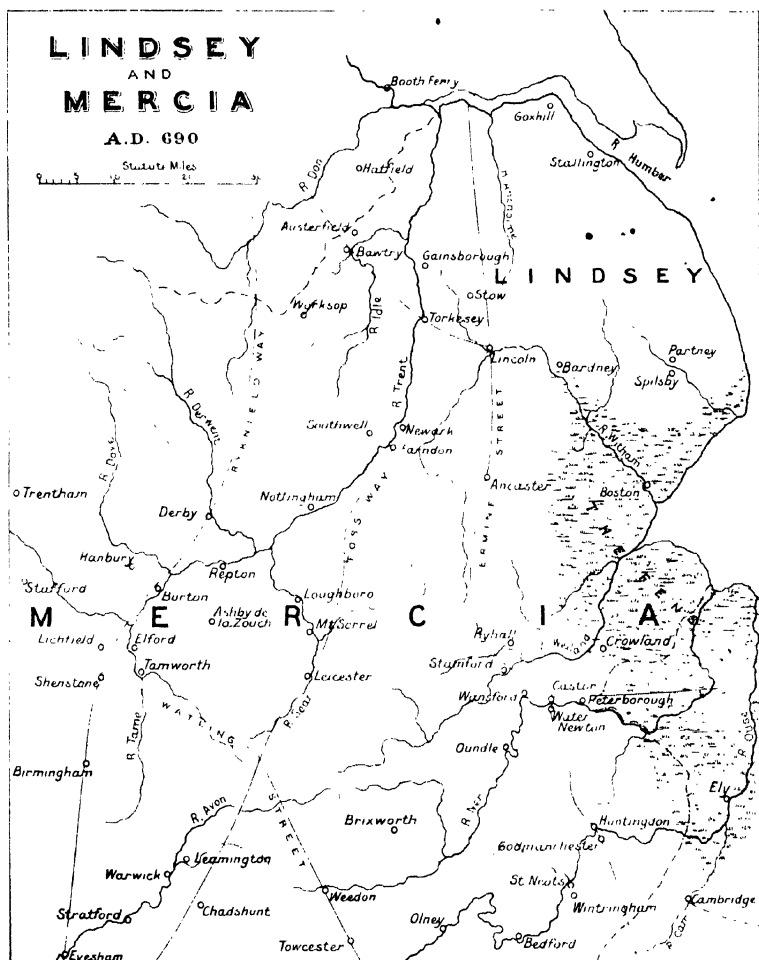
Fifthly and lastly, the brethren of Wearmouth were gladdened and their church was enriched by a valuable collection of beautiful pictures. The Blessed Virgin and the twelve Apostles were displayed on a board stretched across the middle of the nave from wall to wall; scenes in the life of Christ adorned the south wall, and were faced on the north wall by representations of the visions described in the Apocalypse. Thus, as Beda truly remarks, every worshipper, however illiterate, had no sooner entered the church than, whichever way he turned, either the lovable features of Christ and those saints met his gaze, or the precious mystery of the Incarnation engaged his thoughts, or the impending crisis of the Last Judgement put him in the mood for stricter heartsearching.

There is good ground for the conjecture that among the

scenes depicted on the north wall were torments described in the apocryphal Revelation of Peter, which had fallen into oblivion until the recent discovery of a fragment at Akhmim in Upper Egypt. The choice of the north wall corresponds to the fact that old English churches were nearly always built on the northern edge of ground which had already been hallowed by burials. Only on the north side of the church, therefore, could the Devil prowl; only through windows in the north wall could he peep.

The measurements of the existing church make it seem probable that the designer of the original church based its dimensions on a row of three equal cubes, the common edge being four inches short of twenty-three feet.





## CHAPTER XXIII

### CHAD OF LICHFIELD

This is the saint of gentleness and kindness,  
Cheerful in penance and in precept winning;  
Patiently healing of their pride and blindness  
Souls that are sinning.

F. W. Faber on John Henry Newman

**C**EADDA, or Chad, the youngest of Cedd's three brothers, was one of the twelve Angle boys whom Aidan first chose as fit to be trained for priesthood. Like many other ardent young Northumbrian converts he completed his training in Ireland, probably sharing the strenuous life of more than one learned and ascetic community. From those pupils and guests no payment for tuition, board or lodging was ever accepted by their generous teachers and hosts. From the fact that, late in the year 664, Chad succeeded Cedd as abbot of Lastingham it may be inferred that he was one of the original monks and had acted as prior in Cedd's absence.

Like Aidan, his beloved master and pattern, Chad was meek, studious, prayerful, and took poverty for his bride. So profound was his awe of the righteous Judge, so tender his love of mankind, that if, while he was reading or otherwise employed, a sudden gust of wind arose, his mood became at once anxiously prayerful; if the gust grew into a violent and steady gale he closed his book, bowed himself to the ground, and strove like Habakkuk in spirit that, though justly angry with a sinful race of men, God might in wrath remember mercy. When a thunderstorm was raging, or a black stormcloud seemed ready to burst, he sought his place in church and there, fully alarmed by the angry and threatening sky, gave his whole mind to the recital of



prayers and psalms till the horizon was again clear. To the brethren of the monastery he explained such behaviour by quoting and commenting on these two verses of David's triumphant paeon of thanksgiving:

Jahveh thundered in the heavens,  
the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of  
fire.

He sent out his arrows and scattered them;  
He shot forth lightning and discomfited them.

'The Lord's object,' said he, 'in disturbing the atmosphere, rousing the winds and aiming his thunderbolts, is to awaken in earthdwellers a holy awe of Himself, to overthrow their pride and confound their boldness by reminding them of the coming Day of Doom, when He will come cloudborne, amid the glowing embers of heaven and earth, to judge with royal authority both living and dead. It therefore behoves us to pay due heed to his warnings in mingled fear and love. As often as He thus, in storms, puts forth his hand to strike and yet withholds the blow, let us humbly beg for mercy, probe each the recesses of his own heart, clear away the foul rubbish of our thoughts, and take anxious care not to deserve the stroke of his wrath.'

It can hardly be doubted that, like his eldest brother, Chad submitted to the decision of the Conference of Whitby in reference to the reckoning of Easter and the tonsure, but that otherwise his loyalty to Scotie tradition formed a strong contrast to the zeal of Wilfrith for the more dignified and stately but less unworldly tradition of Rome. Among Northumbrian Christians the Romanizing party was probably strongest in Deira, then partly ruled by Alhfrith, the friend and patron of Wilfrith. Just when the latter was playing into the hands of the opposite party by loitering in Gaul after his consecration, Alhfrith fell into disgrace by heading a futile revolt against his father, of which no details are recorded, but to which he may well have been instigated, like Oidilwald, by discontented Welsh

subjects, who offered to make him their independent king. When therefore, as we may fairly suppose, a deputation of leading Bernicians complained to Oswiu that church life in Northumbria was suffering through the prolonged absence of the bishop-elect, and proposed Chad as a fitter candidate for the office, they easily persuaded the king to supersede Wilfrith. As Beda puts it, with his usual tantalizing brevity, the father followed the example set him by his eager son. The new bishop of York had already won a high reputation for holiness of life, sobriety of character, scriptural learning and apostolic zeal. He travelled into Kent to be consecrated and had for the companion of his journey the royal chaplain Eadhed. As no successor to Frithona Deusdedit had yet been appointed, they passed onward into Wessex, in search of Wini, the first bishop of Winchester. The likeness of these two names is, of course, quite accidental. With him were associated, in the consecration of Chad, two Welsh bishops, probably summoned from West Wales. Their joint act was the first step towards union of the divided churches. In the words of the late William Bright, 'a prelate consecrated in Gaul joined with himself two prelates of a different rite, representing the old church of Alban and Restitutus, of Dubricius and David, in the consecration of one who had sat as a boy at Aidan's feet, had but very lately given up' the Scotie reckoning of Easter and was destined to shine, in a brief but graceful episcopate, as 'one of the truest and purest saints' of the heroic age of our island Church.

In the spring of the year 666 Chad returned to Northumbria and was duly installed as bishop of York. Following closely in the footsteps of his master Aidan, and never bestriding a horse, he earnestly strove to maintain true and pure teaching of the faith throughout his vast diocese; tramping over the moors from one lonely homestead to another, as well as through villages and towns, visiting the hovels of the poor as well as the forts of the rich. His

authority was not disputed by Wilfrith, whose influence however brought catholic ritual into such growing favour that the remaining Scots either conformed or departed homeward. It can, moreover, hardly be doubted that the harmony of church life in Northumbria was so marred by the soreness and jealousy of Wilfrith's supporters that both parties were ready, in the year 669, to welcome the arbitration of the new archbishop, Theodore of Tarsus, who, says Beda, travelled everywhere, set bishops where they were needed, and with their help amended whatever he found amiss. Age, vigour and wealth of learning, by making him triply venerable, reinforced the archiepiscopal authority bestowed on him by the Patriarch of the West, and thus enabled him to confer on the adolescent Church of England the blessings of unity and catholicity. He declared Chad's consecration irregular, not only, as it seems, because a duly consecrated bishop had been superseded by him, but because two of his consecrators did not keep the catholic rule for the date of Easter; possibly also on account of some defect in the ritual they used. Thus severely tested, Chad's meekness shone forth brightly. 'If it seems clear to thee,' said he, with a joyful smile, 'that my acceptance of my bishopric was irregular, I gladly resign it. Never, I assure thee, did I deem myself worthy of the office; but, in spite of my unworthiness, when bidden to undertake it, I could not disobey.' Won by such genuine humility and by the whole demeanour of the man, Theodore replied that he need not resign his office but only that see, and proceeded to complete his consecration in due catholic form, possibly with the help of Wilfrith. Happy in his release from a false position, Chad then retired to his monastery at Lastingham but, in September of the same year, was, with Oswiu's permission, presented by Theodore to Wulfhere, as fifth bishop of the Mercians. Of his predecessors the first, Diuma, the second, Ceollach, perhaps also the fourth, Jaruman, were Scots; the third,

Trumhere, an Angle of Deira, was, like them, consecrated by Scotie bishops. Their see was the abbey of Repton.

When bidden by the archbishop to ride instead of walking on his longer journeys, Chad protested that he could not relax an austerity which lifelong habit had endeared to him. 'Nay, but thou shalt ride,' replied his masterful superior, and with his own hand set him on horseback, perhaps with a smiling homethrust in the form of a reminder how highly his holiness had always valued the virtue of obedience. Theodore's age was nearly seventy, Chad's probably less than fifty. The archbishop doubtless had in view the welfare of the widely extended diocese as well as the comfort of his suffragan. Not only Mercia but Lindsey had to be covered by the new bishop in his journeys; and Mercia then included the whole of Central Britain, as far as the Severn on the west and the Thames on the south. In his charming life of St Werburgh Henry Bradshaw thus describes the realm of Penda and Wulfhere:

Many royal rivers were contained in the same  
With sundry kinds of fish sweet and delicious—  
It were tedious to shew of them the divers name  
In rivers and in pooles swimming full plenteous;  
Also forestes parkes chases large and beauteous  
And all beestes of venery pleasant for a king  
To course at liberty he found there pasturing.

Also this royal realm holdeth, as we find,  
Abundance of fruites pleasant and profitable,  
Great plenty of cornes and graines of every kind;  
With hilles, valleys, pastures comely and delectable  
The soil and glebe is set plenteous and commendable;  
In all pleasant properties no part of all this land  
May be compared to this foresaid Merseland.

On fifty hides of land given him by Wulfhere, at Barrow near Goxhill in Lindsey, Chad built a new monastery. For his see he chose Lichfield and built there, near the church of St Mary, a dwelling house which served him and seven or

eight brethren as a place of retirement for prayer and reading in the rare intervals of leisure he and they could snatch from their toils and cares. The manual labour of the house and grounds was entrusted to a remarkable man named Owini. Born and bred in East Anglia, he had risen to be steward, wielding authority even over thanes, in the household of Awdry, whom he accompanied into Northumbria. Under her influence the glow of his faith became so intense that, forsaking his lucrative and influential office, he donned a smock, shouldered axe and hatchet, made his way to the monastery of Lastingham and begged admission. Biblical studies, he confessed, were not in his line, but for that very reason he could devote himself all the more thoroughly to housework and fieldwork. From Lastingham he followed Chad to Lichfield.

It seems probable that for Chad the ground was already hallowed by the martyrdom represented on the seal of the ancient Free Grammar School of Lichfield, and described on page 24 of this volume. The traditional scene of it, at Stichbrook, is called The Christian Field. The ancient name however, Licitfeld, is less probably derived, like lichgate, from lic, which means corpse, than from leccian, which means to water. The twin pools of the place were fed by many converging streams.

For two and a half years Chad's rule of his diocese won him the highest possible renown; then, in the year 672, his earthly career, like his brother Cedd's, was abruptly closed by the recurring pestilence. On Tuesday, February 24, he was alone in the house, reading and praying. Owini was at work outside and the brethren were assembled in the church. Suddenly in the ears of Owini sounded sweet strains of joyous melody, as though angelic singers were descending earthward; approaching from the south-east, the music seemed to reach, fill and surround the oratory, then to retrace its heavenward way. Owini was still standing dazed and puzzled when the bishop opened a

window and clapped his hands. Thus he always summoned within any who were outside. Owini obeyed the summons and was sent in haste to fetch the seven brethren from the church. When all were in his presence Chad thus addressed them:

‘Strive continually to live in love and peace with one another and with all believers. Press onward, heedless of aches and pains, in the narrow path traced for you by my precept and example, and by the deeds and words of the fathers who have been our pioneers. For that lovable guest who has been visiting our brethren has to-day condescended to call on me and summon me away from the world.’

The destroying angel had, in fact, already released from their bodies many Lichfield churchmen, and thus transferred from their earthly abodes to the heavenly building many living stones of the Church. Having bidden the sorrowful brethren make not only his departure but their own the subject of earnest prayer, Chad solemnly blessed them and let them go; but Owini returned alone to inquire the meaning of the strange music he had heard. ‘Truly,’ the bishop assured him, ‘it was the breath of angels coming to summon me to those heavenly rewards for which I have always been passionately longing. They promised to return this day week and to form my escort.’

Even so it befell; his strength of body speedily oozed away; on Tuesday, March 2, having received for the last time the holy housel, he burst his prison bars. His body was buried in St Mary’s church, but afterwards removed to the later church of St Peter. His tomb was a carved monument, similar to the hogbacks found at Dewsbury and elsewhere, resembling a house with tiled roof—so persistent was the primitive belief that the dead need dwelling places similar to those of the living. In the wall was a hole through which devout visitors often thrust a hand in order to take a few particles of the dust that lay on the coffin.

The infusion of such dust in water made a healing potion for man or beast.

A good and sober-minded man, named Wynfrith, who had long served Chad as deacon, succeeded him as bishop. After him are named Chadskirk in Cheshire and Chadshunt in Warwickshire. The cathedral of Lichfield is dedicated to St Mary and St Chad, its porch to St Chad alone. Of the thirty ancient churches which still bear witness to his widespread influence, two are at Middlesmoor and Saddleworth in Yorkshire, the rest within his Mercian diocese, in Cheshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire. Shrewsbury, Stafford and Rochdale have each one of them; most of the others are in villages. Through confusion of his name with his brother's a church in Haggerston is also called St Chad's, instead of St Cedd's.

The predominance of Wulfhere in London seems to have opened that stubborn city to his bishop; for in Fifteen Feet Lane, on the eastern side of Gray's Inn Road, St Chad's Well was, till recently, regarded as a holy fount of healing. From another such was probably named the village Cadwell near Hitchin. On the wooden clogg almanacs, of which the use survived the Stuart period, his day is marked by a sprig of his plant, *cerastium pumilum*.

In Ely cathedral is preserved the base of the memorial cross which was, soon after Owini's death, set up at Had-denham in his honour. Its Latin inscription runs as follows:

LUCEM TUAM OVINO  
DA DEUS ET REQUIE

AMEN

(Vouchsafe, O God, to Owini Thy light and rest.)

His day in the Kalendar is March 4. From the identity of his name with the Welsh Owen we may infer that his forefathers were tillers of the soil who merely changed masters when the Angle invaders drove westward rulers, warriors and clergy.

Of the young Northumbrians who were Chad's comrades in Ireland, one narrowly escaped death in the pestilence of 664, and attributed his recovery to a penitential vow that he would never return to his native land. His name was Ecgberht. Some time after Chad's death Hygbald, abbot of Bardney, visited him. They often talked about such departed veterans, their own patterns of blithe spiritual warfare. When Chad's name cropped up, 'I know a man,' quoth Ecgberht, 'still abiding in the flesh on this island, who, when that hero passed away from the world, saw the soul of his brother Cedd come down from heaven, take with him the parting soul and return to those lofty realms.' Beda felt no doubt about the truth of this vision but did not feel sure that Ecgberht was himself the seer.

In the same comrade of Chad was first kindled the missionary ardour which, in the year 690, drove to Friesland from Ireland a party of twelve Northumbrian Angles, under the leadership of Wilbrord. Mysterious but clear warnings had hindered Ecgberht himself from gratifying his heart's desire. In obedience to one of them, a trance message from Boisil, not to him, but to a former monk of Melrose who was then with him, he 'hallowed Iona afresh to Christ' by persuading abbot Dunchad and the brethren to adopt the catholic Easter and tonsure. There, for the islet was reckoned part of Ireland, he spent the last thirteen years of his life and passed happily away, at the age of ninety, on Easter Day, April 24, 729.



## CHAPTER XXIV. ROYAL ABBESSES (AWDRY, SEXBURH, ERMENILD, WERBURH)

La religion chrétienne a été la vraie patrie de la femme;  
la seule où elle retrouve sa vraie liberté, sa vraie destinée.  
Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident*, v, 259

**T**HE birthplace of Athelthryth was the royal vill at Exning in Suffolk. In common talk her name shrivelled to Awdry, which Shakespeare spelt Audrey. Latin scribes wrote it Etheldreda. The word tawdry bears quaint witness to her fame. Originally a mere contraction of Saint Awdry, it was used to distinguish lace bought at a fair held, in the Isle of Ely and elsewhere, on October 17, the festival of her translation. The original form of her name, which means noble strength, seems to have been her constant watchword. Nobly, according to the moral standard of Latin Christendom, did she determine in girlhood to live and die a maid: strongly, during fifteen years of wedded life, three spent with Tondberht and twelve with Ecgfrith, did she persist in her determination. She is described as a girl of sweet disposition, gentle and kind to all, averse from frivolity, constant in attendance at church, sometimes with her kinsfolk, sometimes alone. So wise was she beyond her years as to illustrate the proverb: 'An unspotted life is ripe old age' (*Wisdom*, iv, 9). Her holiness and beauty attracted many suitors. She long refused to wed Tondberht but yielded at last to the wish of her parents. After marriage they had one mind in Christ and never quarrelled. The wisdom that was hers by nature may have been reaped by him as the fruit of long experience, including a former marriage. Though his death made her bewail the loss of his companionship, she was glad to recover her freedom, hoping she had thus finally escaped the hindrances

of worldly affairs. During the five years of her widowhood she dwelt in retirement on her own Isle of Ely, a foggy wilderness of osiers and trickling streams. The island had been given her by Tondberht as her morning gift or jointure. Relieved by her loyal steward, Owini, of all worldly cares, she and a few likeminded comrades devoted themselves to religious exercises, starving their bodies and feasting their souls. Her second marriage was urged by her kinsfolk, chiefly perhaps by her sister Sexburh, who may have been moved to propose it by her husband's first cousin Eanfled, the mother of Ecgrith. Christian princesses willing to wed were still scarce in Britain. Anna's youngest daughter, Wihtburh, who was then a member of the Ely sisterhood, might have been a fitter bride for the young Bernician prince if she had not chosen the life of an ascetic recluse. Later she dwelt in a cell at Dereham, near the North Elmham which became in 673 the see of the new Norfolk bishopric. There the well from which she drew water still bears her name. Her daily drink of milk came from the breast of a tame doe which loved her fondling hand. One day it fell dead at her feet, pierced to the heart by an arrow. Soon afterwards the cruel archer became scrofulous and died of that wasting disease. An inscription on her well records that the ruins are those of the tomb from which her body, 'that precious relic,' was in the year 974 stolen by the abbot and monks of Ely and buried in their cathedral near her three sisters. Her festival is March 17.

On each of the eight corbels which are ranged round the octagon of Ely Cathedral is carved a group of figures representing an event of Awdry's life. The first of them is her marriage to Ecgrith, soon after his first shield and javelin, the tokens of admission to manhood, had been formally presented to him. The bridegroom's stature fits his age, but his beard is proleptic. He became sub-king of Deira about four years later.

Then Awdry enjoyed the friendship and profited by the

ministration not only of Wilfrith but of Cuthbert, for whom, as a token of her affection, her own hands afterwards embroidered with gold and jewels a stole and mantle. In the twelfth century these gifts were still adorning his shrine in the cathedral of Durham. She graciously welcomed the many who came from near and far to pay homage to their holy queen, and so enriched them by her wise and gentle talk that, though they brought her costly gifts, they went home feeling deeply in her debt.

Never did Awdry deem herself so truly a queen as when she gladly exchanged her purple and fine linen for a coarse black nun's robe, and dominion over a royal household for bondage to Christ. In order to present her real self to God she laid aside the unreal pomp of royalty. By lowly obedience to the hallowing monastic rule she completely subdued her own carnal will. In the second of the Ely carvings her royal crown has been laid on the altar before which she kneels; Wilfrith is pronouncing a benediction, the abbess of Coldingham is placing the veil on her head. The sculptor was clearly unaware that not until the year 856 did the wife of any English king wear a crown. Then, in the cathedral of Rheims, archbishop Hincmar crowned Judith, the young French bride of Athelwulf, king of Wessex.

When she had for a year been learning there how easy is the Lord's yoke and how light His burden, news came that Ecgfrith was preparing to fetch her back to York. He had found it harder than he expected to live without her and had been unendurably taunted by his thanes for letting her go her own way. Guided by Abb's advice, Awdry sought safety in flight. Her escape from her pursuers forms the subject of the third carving. Accompanied by two nuns, named Sewen and Sewar, who had formerly been her maids, she climbed the cliff known as St Colbert's Head and there remained hidden until the king had drawn off his armed force and abandoned the search. During the week it lasted,

so runs her beautiful legend, the sea rose high enough to encircle and protect their refuge. They had nothing to eat but quenched their thirst at a spring which, in answer to her prayer, gushed forth from the hard rock. It was also for centuries firmly believed in the neighbourhood that, both going up and coming down, they left on the rugged path permanent footprints as clear as a waxen mould. Even so, in the legend of Abb, it is recorded that, before she was veiled by bishop Finan, she refused to marry a Scotie chieftain named Eadan and fled from his pursuit to the lofty promontory which bears her name. In answer to her prayers the sea rose and for three days surrounded her hiding-place.

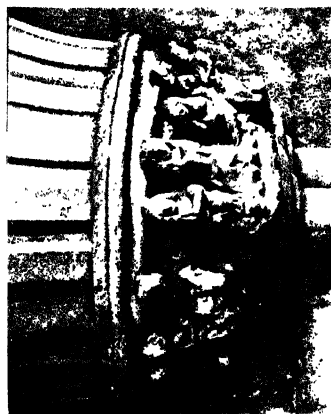
They crossed the Humber at Wintringham and were heartily welcomed at Altham, which rose like an island amid the widespread marshes. There they abode long enough to build a rude church, and won by their prayers many boons for their neighbours. Resuming her journey southward through Lindsey, meanly clad as befitted a lowly pilgrim, the blessed maiden shunned the main road and chose devious byways. She wished neither to be captured by crafty pursuers nor to be questioned by strangers about the cause of her journey. One stifling hot day, when she was ready to faint with fatigue, the three wayfarers came to a level sward, girt on every side with fragrant flowers. There happened the marvel shown on the fourth corbel. Soothed by the peaceful beauty of the scene, Awdry thrust her staff into the ground, lay down and fell asleep. On awaking refreshed, she was amazed, so ran a persistent local tradition, to find herself lying in the shadow cast by a leafy sapling, which had taken the place of her staff. It afterwards grew to be the finest ashtree in the district. Near that scene, called Etheldredstow, a church was built in her honour.

The isle of Ely, 600 hides in area, took its name from the eels which swarmed in its waters. A church built there in the

year 607, by some of Austin's companions, had been destroyed by Penda. When, at the end of her toilsome journey, Awdry found herself once more among her own people, she appointed as her chaplain a priest named Huna and lost no time in rebuilding the church. So many devout Christians came to live near her and gave her their daughters to train, that she founded for them a convent, which afterwards developed into a double monastery. After helping and advising her Wilfrith consecrated her for the office of abbess. The fifth corbel shows her receiving from him her pastoral staff. The temporal and spiritual rulers of Mercia and East Anglia jointly conferred on the land thus dedicated to God's service freedom from all burdensome obligations and a privilege of sanctuary which was confirmed nearly four centuries later, in the reign of Edward the Confessor, by pope Victor II. During the erection of the buildings and the settlement in them of the new community Wilfrith was Awdry's unfailing and wise counsellor. By him, before the end of the year 673, the new church, dedicated like the old to the Virgin Mary, was duly consecrated. Materials and craftsmen had been generously provided by Aldwulf, king of East Anglia, her first cousin and Hild's nephew.

A noble pearl of high magnificence,  
A rose of paradise full of pre-eminence,

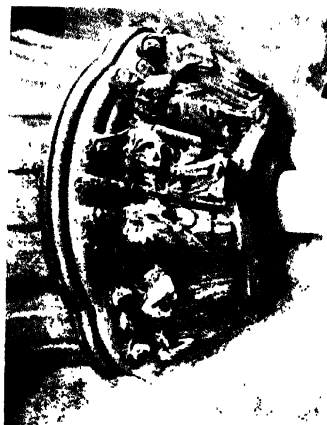
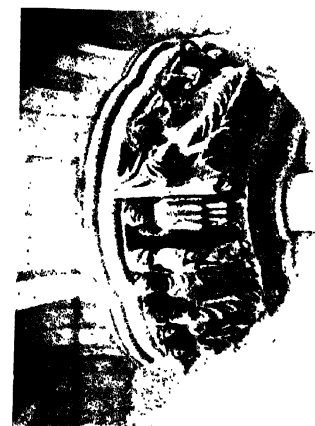
was Werburh, according to her admiring biographer, Henry Bradshaw. After she had steadfastly refused to marry the king of Wessex and other suitors, on the ground that she was irrevocably espoused to her Lord and Saviour, her father Wulfhere escorted her to Ely, the convent of her choice, and summoned thither all their kinsfolk to celebrate her 'ghostly marriage.' The abbey refectory in which they feasted was adorned with rich tapestry, showing many a Bible scene and many a martyr's triumph. After the banquet a harper sang lays of Ancient Rome.











CLAY COREELS

In the year 675 Wulfhere died and was buried at Lichfield. His widow Ermenild, sister of Earcongot, then took the veil at Ely, humbling herself before her daughter as the senior in rank; but Werburh could not forget her own natural subjection; so there arose between them a 'sweet contention.' For seventeen years that queen had nobly exerted herself, in harmony with king and bishops, to coax away the stubborn heathenism of the Mercian tribes. Many a hard heart yielded to the charm of her sunny smiles, her sweetly reasonable talk, her pure life and her merciful deeds. Yet she was too much in earnest to make any compromise, and quietly but firmly uprooted every form of idolatry.

At Ely Atburh also, a daughter of Aldwulf who became abbess of Repton, was probably trained by her father's cousin.

However high the worldly position of the ealdormen and thanes or of their wives and daughters who sought admission to that monastery or to any other, the Benedictine rule was never relaxed in their favour; and such, in those early days, was the prevalent ardour of the pursuit after holiness that they found zest in hardships which might well have daunted them. None shirked the most slavish of tasks but rather welcomed them as a practical test of brotherly love.

In Elge, as the name of the isle was originally spelt, the first syllable is Hebrew for God and the second Greek for land. Such a coincidence naturally strengthened the resolution of both monks and nuns to make their home a land of God. In reference to the ascetic example set by the abbess and joyfully followed by all, we are told that she ceased to wear linen and went wolward, that is, wool clad. In those days weaving was much coarser than wearers of Jaeger or Rasurel garments can easily imagine. The luxury of a hot bath she allowed herself only at the approach of such great festivals as Epiphany, Easter and

Whitsuntide. Even then she did not herself bathe until she and her handmaidens had first, in obedience to their Lord's command, washed the feet of every other member of her happy family. It was in those days an article of orthodoxy that, after the soul had been truly cleansed by baptism, the body needed only such bathing as might seem a memorial thereof. Those three festivals were the customary times for that rite. Rarely, except on the greater festivals or under stress of especial need, did Awdry taste food more than once a day. After matins, the hour of which fell between midnight and 3 a.m., she always, unless hindered by serious illness, remained in church till daybreak, earnestly praying while the others slept. By such austerities she won a clearness of mental vision which enabled her, so Beda was informed, to foretell not only the visitation of plague which, in the year 679, ended her own earthly career, but also the number of her spiritual children who were, by the same stroke of destiny, to be hurried out of the world. During her last illness she suffered from a painful abscess on her neck, beneath her jaw, and gave this good reason for bearing it cheerfully:

‘In my girlhood I used to overload my throat with gaudy necklaces; now therefore God is kindly letting me win forgiveness of such frivolity by wearing, instead of gold and pearls, this fiery red lump of ugliness.’

Her leech Cynifrith, whose attendance on her forms the subject of the sixth carving, drained the abscess by lancing; but the relief thus afforded lasted only a couple of days. On the third day, June 23, 679, racked with pains, she suddenly passed away. In obedience to her order, her coffin had been made not, as was then customary, of stone, but of wood, and was buried in the common graveyard. Her friend Wilfrith was then in Rome, placing Ely and other monasteries under the aegis of St Peter. He had visited her late in the summer of 678, before he crossed to Friesland.

Together they had gazed on the comet and talked in awe-struck tones about its portent. Her sympathy consoled and cheered him in his affliction.

The life of Sexburh in Kent, as the wife of king Earconberht, is thus described by Henry Bradshaw:

The honourable Sexburh and blessed matron,  
Refusing worldly honours and solemnity,  
Preferred meekness and perfect devotion  
Above all riches, power and dignity;  
Avoided ambition, observed humility,  
Upon poor people ever had compassion,  
And then relieved with due ministration.

She made her palace many times a hospital,  
Her private cubicle a devout oratory,  
As a kind mother amicable in court and hall  
Meekly fulfilled the seven works of mercy;  
Often in church, selde among company;  
Yet ever when she might have time and space  
Magnified and praised in secret place.

To her influence he attributes the destruction of idols throughout Kent by Earconberht and his enforcement of the Lenten fast on all his Christian subjects. She was the mother of Earcongot and Ermenild. During the early years of her widowhood, which began July 14, 664, Sexburh acted as regent for her son Ecgberht; then, having received from him the island of Sheppey, she build there the convent known as Minster-in-Sheppey and was veiled for the abbacy by archbishop Theodore. Her church, like Awdry's, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

As soon as Ermenild had completed her novitiate at Ely her mother summoned her to Sheppey and resigned in her favour, giving to the sisters and schoolgirls as her reason that none was fit to rule who had not first learnt to obey. The number of the whole community was then seventy. Sexburh took Ermenild's place at Ely, beside Werburh, who had two such different grandparents as the newcomer and

Penda. On the death of Awdry Sexburh was chosen by the unanimous vote of the bereaved and sorrowing community to be abbess in her stead. Following closely in her footsteps, and feeling sure that, though dead in the flesh, she was living in the presence of their Lord, Sexburh was eager rather to serve his flock than to give herself airs of authority.

About sixteen years later she decided to raise her sister's bones out of their grave, place them in a stone cist and entomb them within the church. Some of the brethren were therefore sent in search of quarried stone. As there was none to be found in the neighbouring swamps, they rowed up the Granta or Cam, as far as the ruins of the ancient Roman settlement which foreshadowed the town Cambridge. There, at a spot called Earmeswerk, which probably now lies below the garden terrace of Magdalene College, they had the luck to find a beautifully made cist of white marble, with lid to match. They thanked God and sped homeward with their precious burden.

The subsequent translation of Awdry's body is thus described by an eye-witness, the leech Cynifrith:

'A tent was spread over the grave; round it stood the whole community, brethren on one side, sisters on the other, singing psalms under the leadership of Wilfrith. The abbess and a few others entered, to raise and wash the bones. Suddenly we heard her voice ring loud and clear, "Glory be to the name of the Lord!" Presently she drew back the curtain door of the tent and bade me enter. Within I saw, raised from the grave and laid on a pallet, the body of the holy maiden, looking as though she merely slept. They removed the face cloth and showed me the incision I had made. Strange to say, instead of the open and gaping wound with which she had been buried, appeared only the slightest trace of a scar. Moreover, on the linen shrouds wrapped round her body appeared no sign of decay, but they all seemed as fresh and fragrant as before they enfolded her sinless limbs.'

Having washed the body and robed it anew, the nuns placed it in the marble cist, which fitted so closely that it seemed to have been made to her measure. There was even for her head a shelf of exactly the right size. The date of this translation was October 17, 695. The old wrappings were carefully preserved and wrought many cures of sick folk who trustfully touched them. The old wooden coffin became famous as a healer of sore eyes and weak sight.

Soon after Awdry had passed away, Werburh was called by her uncle Ethelred to take charge as abbess of convents he had founded for nuns at Hanbury and Trentham in Staffordshire. She is said to have also turned into a convent the royal vill at Weedon in Northamptonshire, and to have exercised general superintendence over all the religious houses of Mercia. After the tragic death of Osthryth, in the year 697, Werburh became Ethelred's chief counsellor and spiritual director.

She was minister, says Henry Bradshaw, rather than mistress, handmaid rather than prioress. When her nuns assembled in the church for nocturns they always found her awaiting them on her knees. After mattin lauds had been chanted she tarried there till dawn. Like Awdry she wore no linen and ate but one meal a day. Her diligent teaching was no less tender than earnest. She allowed no idleness during leisure hours, but made her daughters read for pastime legends of the saints and lives of the fathers. Her favourite motto was:

Please God and love Him:  
Nothing then need ye doubt.

At Weedon predatory wild geese were marvellously submissive to her orders. Many sick folk came from far and near to be healed by the prevailing power of her prayers.

On July 6, 699, Sexburh passed through the gate of death. Her daughter Ermenild was chosen to be third

abbess. Werburh then succeeded her mother, first as third abbess of Minster-in-Sheppey and afterwards as fourth abbess of Ely. The year of Ermenild's death is unknown; her day in the Kalendar is February 13.

The final prayer of Werburh, as she lay dying at Trent-ham, is thus reported by Bradshaw:

And grant me, sweet Lord, through Thy goodness,  
Whoso in Thy name upon me doth call  
In languor, misery, in pain or sickness,  
Also women with child, in pain's thrall,  
May have remedy and help special,  
And people in prison, halt, blind and lame  
By me may magnify Thy glorious name.

Her dies natalis is February 3; the year of her death is not recorded. On June 21, 708, in obedience to her own order, her body was enshrined at Hanbury. In the year 875 shrine and contents were transferred by the men of that place to Chester, the city of which she became patroness, and placed in the ancient church of St Peter and St Paul. They thus put that precious relic beyond reach of the Danes, who had already driven their king Burhred from Repton.

The seventh Ely carving is a twofold memorial of the translation of Awdry's body. One group of figures represents Sexburh and Ermenild conferring about the matter, while two nuns raise the lid of the coffin; the other group, a few awestruck bystanders, gaze on the crowned and life-like corpse in their midst.

The eighth and last carving commemorates the most remarkable of the many posthumous miracles ascribed to Awdry. In the year 1116 an elderly penitent, named Brithstan, believing that he had not long to live, gave up himself and his all to the patroness of Ely and begged to be enrolled among the novices. Born and bred amid the flotsam and jetsam of the world, he had been so entrapped by moral pitfalls that he could find no more honourable

livelihood than moneylending. Bodily disease had long been combining with mental distress to deepen his inner gloom when the eyes of his soul were suddenly opened to the Light. Furious at this prospect of defeat, the Father of Lies found a willing agent in an officer of king Henry, named Robert Malant, who charged Brithstan with theft from the royal treasury and, in the king's name, forbade the prior to receive him. Having been brought to the assize court at Huntingdon, this hapless victim of satanic guile was tried and condemned by a judge named Ralph Bass. Among the assessors were Hervey, the first bishop of Ely, abbots Reynold of Ramsey and Ronald of Thorney. Loaded with chains, the prisoner was taken to London and thrust into a dark dungeon. Shivering and famished with hunger, he prayed as well as he knew for divine help. So sensible was he of his own vileness that he dared not trust to the mediation of St Benedict alone, and therefore made unceasing and tearful supplication both to him and to St Awdry.

At the end of five months, when blindfold Hope had almost broken her last lutestring, he heard the bells of the city churches ringing out their peal to nocturns. It was three days since he had tasted food and his voice faltered as, perhaps for the last time, he pronounced the names of the saints who seemed so deaf. Suddenly the darkness was pierced by a light which made him blink. With awestruck gaze he beheld the dazzling forms of three ghostly visitors. To Awdry's question, naming him and asking him why he had so often called them, he could answer not a word; but, when she named herself and her companions and asked if he wanted to be set free, his longing found eager utterance. Then Benedict put a finger through the connecting ring of the fetters, easily broke it, and flung them away with such wrathful violence that the noise of their fall awoke the three gaolers. They hastily unlocked the door of the dungeon and entered with lighted torches. Their first



questions were answered, not by Brithstan but by his fellow prisoner, who declared he had seen a light and heard voices, but could tell neither who the speakers were nor what they had said and done. Then Brithstan spoke for himself:

‘ St Benedict has been here, with St Awdry and her sister Sexburh: they have removed the fetters from my feet. If ye disbelieve me, believe your own eyes.’

Soon after sunrise they reported the strange news to queen Matilda, who was then in London. A court chaplain named Ralph, sent by her to verify the report, heard from both prisoners all they could tell, burst into tears and exclaimed:

‘ Brother, well met! I also serve St Benedict and St Awdry.’

While he was escorting Brithstan to the palace, rumour flew, swifter than any bird, through the city. As he stood before the queen and many high officers of state, cheers rose on every side from the crowded streets. By her order church bells were rung and thanksgiving services held. From one church to another went Brithstan, returning thanks, thronged by his admirers. At the abbey church of St Peter, called Westminster to distinguish it from St Paul’s, he was met by a procession of monks. Their leader, abbot Gilbert, thus greeted him:

‘ If relics of the dead ought to be joyfully received in our church, much rather let us give honourable welcome to such living relics as thee our brother, to whom God has thus done justice.’

When he started to return to Ely, Brithstan found his northward road lined on both sides by a motley crowd of citizens assembled to bid him godspeed. On his arrival the bishop and monks marched out to meet him. He was duly tonsured and frocked. His gyves were hung up in front of the altar as a memorial of the miracle.

## CHAPTER XXV

### WILFRITH BUILDING

The house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries. 1 Chron. xxii, 5

**I**N York Minster its new master found plenty of work for his band of craftsmen. The pinnacles of the roof were leaky, the windows mere openings, the walls streaked with rain and befouled by birds whose nests were amid the rafters. Wilfrith did not content himself with repairing and leading the roof, filling the windows with the first glass used in England, and restoring to the walls their snowy sheen. He also adorned the altar with costly patens and chalices, and abundantly endowed the church with lands that had been entrusted to him for religious uses.

Oswiu's gift to Wulfhere of bishop Chad is the last recorded act of his toilsome and strenuous reign. When prostrated by the illness that proved fatal he was proposing, in the event of recovery, to travel to Rome under Wilfrith's guidance and there end his days on holy ground. He died on February 15, 671, and was buried in his family minster of Whitby, where was also Edwin's tomb. His widow Eanfled, Wilfrith's patroness, received from Hild, Wilfrith's adversary, the veil of a nun, and afterwards helped their daughter Alfed to discharge the duties of abbess. Both were in due time buried there beside him. His successor was Ecgrith, the elder of their two sons, who had been ruling Deira as sub-king. The younger, Alfwinn, was invested by his brother with the same dignity.

In the first year of Ecgrith's reign there was set up at Bewcastle in Cumberland a permanent memorial of Wilfrith's affection for his hapless friend Alhfrith, who must

then have been dead, though the date of his death is not recorded. Perhaps he had there been met and slain at the head of rebellious Kymry. The crosshead was blown out of its socket by a gale of wind in the year 1607. Bewcastle was then the centre of the most lawless part of the borderland. The shaft is a single block of grey freestone, fourteen and a half feet high. Its rectangular section tapers from twenty-two by twenty-one inches at the base to fourteen by thirteen inches at the top. On the west face are carved three figures: the topmost a nimbed John the Baptist bearing a nimbed Agnus Dei; the central Jesus Christ, with a large nimbus, robed as a priest, bearing in his left hand the Scroll of Remembrance, raising his right hand to bless, trampling with his feet a lion and adder; the lowest Alhfrith, bearing a hawk on his left wrist and carrying a spear in his right hand. A runic inscription records that the beacon of victory was set up in his honour by Hwaetred, Wothgar and Alfwolthu, and ends with the sentence:

Pray for his soul.

On the south face are three symmetrical interlacings separated by two panels of foliage, a sundial worked into the upper panel and a runic inscription which records the date. Of the five panels on the north face, the central is filled with chequers, the two intermediate with the device called triquetra, the two extreme with such conventional vinescrolls as are found in the earliest Christian art of Greece or Italy; lines of runes name Wulfhere, his mother Cyneswith and his sister Cyneburh, Alhfrith's wife. While her husband was ruling Elmet Cyneburh had taken the veil in her own convent at Castor, whither Cyneswith had probably preceded her. Thence in 972 their bodies were removed to Peterborough. The east face is covered with a single vine-bearing scroll, full of fruit, which is being eaten by beasts and birds, namely a fox, a hawk or eagle, a raven and two squirrels.

In this famous memorial there may be a reference not only to the victory of the Crucified, but also to Oswald's at Hefenfeld, in the year of Wilfrith's birth. 'The Byzantine pose and dignity of the figures recall the ivory chair of Maximian at Ravenna. The draperies have the full folding and massive modelling of late classic design, and generally the technique shows a practised chisel as well as the assured methods of a finished school in figure and decorative design. We do not again reach such technical attainment in English work until close upon the thirteenth century.' The highly skilled artists who thus helped Wilfrith to gratify his love of the best probably came from Lombardy. The chequers and knotwork came into England from Ireland. The tree of life on the east face runs in graceful curves from bottom to top, passing nine times across and threading its way among the peaceful and happy beasts and birds. The names of the three craftsmen show that they were Angles. They had acquired at home consummate skill in wood and metal work, and learnt from Greek or Byzantine sculptors in the train of Wilfrith how metal patterns might be rendered in stone.

Wilfrith's next stately fabric was his lofty basilica at Ripon, built from foundations to roof of polished stone and doubtless modelled on another he had seen at Rome. Its columns and arches were gracefully varied in form, the spoil perhaps of Roman ruins at Isurium, the modern Aldborough. In order that it might be a worthy chamber for the true Bridegroom and his Bride the Church, it was lavishly adorned with gold, silver and purple. To its dedication flocked, besides Ecgrith and Alfwin, abbots, ealdormen, reeves and men of every lower rank. The form of dedication he probably used is described in chapter xxxiii of this volume. The altar was sumptuously draped with purple and cloth of gold. After he had duly administered the housel to all present, Wilfrith, standing in front of the altar and facing the congregation, read out in a clear voice a

list of the estates, in Lancashire, Cumberland and Westmorland, as well as in Yorkshire, which formerly, or on that very day, had been granted him by Oswiu and Ecgfrith, with the assent of their witan. Among them were Amounderness, the country between the Ribble and the Mersey, Gilling, Duddondale and Cartmel. He also read a list of sites, scattered up and down the country, from which the ancient British clergy had been driven by the invading Angles. His object was doubtless thus formally and publicly to reclaim hallowed ground from lay holders for the benefit of the Church. The ceremony was immediately followed by feasting and high revelry, which lasted three days and three nights. Englishmen in their cups are proverbially openhanded; and Wilfrith probably took full advantage of the concession he thus made to the heathen habits of his powerful and wealthy guests. When they came to their sober senses they may have begun to owe him a grudge on that account. At heart he must have despised their sensuality and coarseness, and he was, when thwarted, no more able than they to hide his real feelings. Moreover, though upright and straightforward in all their dealings, those rude warrior farmers could neither read nor write, and were therefore liable to be treated with galling condescension by their brilliant young scholar bishop.

The medieval ascription of Ripon was to St Wilfrith as well as to St Peter. In modern times the original dedication to St Peter has dropped out of sight. Of Wilfrith's basilica only the crypt remains and has suffered hardly at all from the ravages of time. Where there was at first only a recess for a lamp, the ventilation hole known as Wilfrid's Needle has been pierced through the wall. According to popular tradition, a young woman who can squeeze through the hole thereby proves the steadiness of her character and wins a sure prospect of being married within a year of the achievement.

Among Wilfrith's costly gifts to his new church was a

splendid copy of the four Gospels, the letters being of burnished gold and the pages of purple vellum, prepared by an art the secret of which is lost. A similar volume of later date was given, together with the title *Defender of the Faith*, by pope Leo X to Henry VIII, and now lies in the Treasure Room of Mr Pierpont Morgan's magnificent library at New York. The cover is inlaid with gold and jewels and the colour of the pages ranges through every imaginable hue from royal dark purple to purple of a rosy tint.

The young king's prowess was soon severely tested by two formidable invasions. On the north, the Picts did their utmost to shake off the Northumbrian yoke. From every nook and cranny of the Highlands wild kerns swarmed like ants to join the southward-marching host. Ecgrith did not await the attack but hastily collected his cavalry and led them across the frontier, ably supported by a bold sub-king named Beornheth. In spite of their numerical superiority and skill in taking cover, the rebels were utterly routed, and their piled corpses so completely filled two streams that the victorious pursuers crossed dryshod, slaying the panic-stricken fugitives. Cowed by their defeat, the Picts beyond the Forth tamely submitted to Ecgrith.

In the early years of his strenuous reign Wulfhere had not only pushed the frontier of Mercia as far as the Severn, the Wye and the Thames, but had become overlord of the East Saxons and South Saxons. At the death of the hero of Winwidfield that son of Penda was practically master of the whole of England south of the Humber. Impelled by vaulting ambition, he mustered all the southern tribes and marched northward in order to exact from Ecgrith submission and tribute. He was defeated with heavy loss by a force smaller than his own, forfeited Lindsey and became a payer instead of a receiver of tribute.

Not only victory over his foes but abundant harvests filled Ecgrith's subjects with joy and made them so peacefully disposed that his kingdom was free from internal dis-

cord. His martial vigour may well have been due to the abstemious life he had for twelve years, since the age of fifteen, been living with his nominal wife Awdry, whose influence over a husband at least ten years her junior must have been in every way salutary. At the date of their marriage he had no prospect of kingship. Soon after the fall of his elder half-brother Alhfrith, probably in the year 665, he became sub-king of Deira and probably made Oswinthorp his headquarters. After his father's death another elder half-brother, Aldfrith, born out of wedlock, was set aside in his favour by the witan of Northumbria. To his natural desire for offspring was then, of course, added the wish of his ealdormen and thanes that he should become the father of an heir to the throne, but Awdry was inexorably determined never to become a mother. In his distress he appealed to Wilfrith, who had become the queen's most intimate friend:

‘Land and money in abundance shall be thine if thou canst overcome her scruples; well wot I that no other man stands higher than I in her favour.’

The bishop, however, honestly believed that Awdry had chosen the better part and therefore made the serious mistake of stiffening her resistance. When, with Ecgfrith's leave, she became, in the year 672, a nun at Coldingham, it was Wilfrith who veiled her. She had already bestowed on him her morning gift or jointure, the fertile valley known as Hexhamshire; else she might have thought it right to restore the gift to her deserted husband. However good in law, Wilfrith's title to the land might fairly be held bad in equity. In course of time the king widened the growing breach between himself and his bishop by presuming to marry a West Saxon princess named Eormenburh, who took a violent dislike to the princely prelate. If Ecgfrith was ever troubled with qualms of conscience about his own conduct in the matter, the unfruitfulness of his second marriage may have seemed to him just retribution.

The name Hexham came into use in the fourteenth or fifteenth century and is the shortened form of Hextildesham; Hextild being the old name of the Cockshaw Burn which lies westward of the town. The name Hallgarth of another burn on the west was originally Halig Gut, which means holy stream; and Halgutstadt, the old name of the town, was probably given it by Wilfrith. Hexhamshire, the widest and most fertile valley watered by the Tyne, is twelve miles long and nearly six wide. The town stands on the western end of a high natural terrace, and is overlooked on every side by loftier heights. The name Heart of Britain given it by the natives is justified by its position midway on a line drawn from north to south of the island. The church which Wilfrith built there was believed to have no equal west of the Alps. In shape it was cruciform with an apsidal east end. The walls were three-storied, very high and long, rising from aisles and arcade to triforium and clerestory. The capitals of the pillars were sculptured. The walls were pierced in every direction with galleries and flights of steps, secret passages and mysterious nooks of every kind, in which a host of men could hide themselves, whether their object was the privacy of devotion or the safety of their lives. Underground there was intercommunication by dark passages, crypts and oratories, which gave additional security in time of danger, not only to monks and refugees, but also to relics, books, vestments and other treasures. At intervals along the walls were round towers, ascended by winding stone stairs, which contained enough rooms and hiding-places for a numerous garrison. Passages led from the towers, hither and thither, above and below, so that a man might walk all round the the church unseen by any within. Brilliantly coloured paintings of biblical heroes and scenes, the books as they were truly called of all who could not read, covered the inner surfaces of the walls and guided into good channels the thoughts of worshippers. The church as a whole was



gratefully dedicated to St Andrew, in whose church at Rome the founder's youthful prayers had been heard. Remains of Roman buildings provided Wilfrith with much of his material. Not he but his friend and successor Acca had the satisfaction of completing the execution of the magnificent design. In the beautiful side chapels which flanked the nave above and below, Acca placed altars dedicated to St Mary, St Michael, St John the Baptist, also to apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins; to all the saints, in fact, whose relics they had collected in Rome. Behind each altar its appropriate relics were reverently enshrined. The lives of those saints, codices of the Scriptures and writings of Church fathers formed the nucleus of a library which Acca was constantly enriching with new treasures. He was also zealous in providing beautiful lamps, communion plate and all such other things as can be used to adorn worthily a house of God.

Hexham-on-Tyne, like Melrose-on-Tweed, held out towards Cumbria the right hand of Christian fellowship. In course of time the monasteries of Tynemouth, Hexham, Lanercost, Wetheral and Carlisle, stretching like the Roman wall from sea to sea, formed a complete religious bond of union between East and West. Except in the year 875, when the town and the stately array of monastic buildings, including the precious library, were destroyed by Viking invaders, the privileged peace of Hexham was for four centuries undisturbed; then the inhabitants were threatened with massacre by Malcolm, king of Scotland, in revenge for the robbery of his messengers near the church. The priest in charge, Eilaf the younger, tried in vain to appease his wrath, but had in the night a remarkable vision of two bishops, Wilfrith and Cuthbert, riding northward and bringing, to the despairing crowd that thronged the church, tidings of hope. 'Fear not,' the founder seemed to say, 'for when the morn cometh I will spread from the source of Tyne to its mouth a net that none



SHAFT OF CROSS AT BEWCASTLE



can pass.' On the morrow, after an unclouded sunrise, dense fog rolled down the river and caused Malcolm's murderous agents, stark men of Galloway, to wander wide of their mark. No sooner had the fog lifted than the river, swollen by western rains, rose so high in a strong rushing flood that it was for three days impassable. In these hindrances Malcolm saw the finger of God and forbore the sacrilegious vengeance he had sworn. By the same Eilaf the monastery was in the year 1113, at the instance of archbishop Thurstan, surrendered to a colony of Austin canons ruled by a prior named Asketill. Twenty-five priors had succeeded him when, in the year 1536, Hexham shared the fate of the smaller monasteries throughout England.

The nave was then unfinished of a church which had begun, two centuries earlier, to rise from the ruins of Wilfrith's. As lately as August 8, 1908, was duly consecrated the new nave of that stately but scarred fabric, beneath which lies intact, defying with solid walls the wrack of time, Wilfrith's crypt. One of the covering stones of its north passage was probably taken from the ruined gateway of Corstopitum, near Corbridge; for it bears an inscription on which may still be read the full names and titles of Septimius Severus and Caracalla; also, beneath a deliberate erasure, the tragic record of his murder by his own brother, the name and title

PUBLIUS SEPTIMIUS GETA CAESAR.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### CUTHBERT THE ANCHORET

Nul ne remportait de cet îlot battu des flots la souffrance, la tentation, le remords qui l'y avait conduit.

Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident*, iv, 409.

But fain saint Hilda's nuns would learn  
If on a rock, by Lindisfarne,  
Saint Cuthbert sits, and toils to frame  
The seaborne beads that bear his name.  
Such tales had Whitby's fishers told  
And said they might his shape behold  
And hear his anvil sound. *Marmion*, Canto II.

**C**UTHBERT'S active life as prior of Lindisfarne was broken by intervals of lonely retirement to a detached fragment of the basaltic line of rock which forms the south-western edge of that island. The name of that place of retreat is now St Cuthbert's Island. As the years passed, his longing for complete seclusion from the haunts of men grew more intense and was regarded with favour by both abbot and brethren. Thus did he seek, in the words of the Psalmist, to go from strength to strength.

About six miles south-east of Lindisfarne, nearly opposite Bamborough, lies a cluster of twenty-three islets, divided by Staple Sound into the westerly Fern group and the more numerous easterly Staples group. Among the former, the largest and nearest to the mainland is Farne, the modern House Island, which had been the scene of Aidan's lonely wrestling and now became for nine years, from 676 to 685, the home of his unflinching successor. It is girt, except along its northern shore, by a belt of basaltic rocks which rises, at the south-west corner, eighty feet above sea-level, and slopes gradually to the haven on the

eastern shore. Northward the islet is so exposed that the waves break over it as over the hull of a shipwrecked vessel. Sometimes storm and tide combine to drive salt foam over the whole island, drenching to the skin the shivering wayfarer and penetrating the chinks of his dwelling. Cuthbert found Farne barren, treeless, destitute of fresh water and occupied, as we are gravely assured, by a legion of demons. Having buckled on the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation, he speedily routed and expelled them with the sword of the Spirit. Then, as monarch of his realm, he proceeded to build his ideal palace on the model of the dwellings of his neolithic ancestors. Round a nearly circular plot of land, four or five poles in area, he raised a wall higher than himself, using turf and unhewn stones cut from within. He thus lowered the level of his floor to such a depth that his eyes could behold, when he was at home, nothing but a circular patch of sky. This rude dwelling was divided into an oratory and a living room. It was partially roofed with rough poles and hay. Near the haven was a larger guesthouse for the Lindisfarne brethren and other visitors. Not far from it was found, by digging, a spring of fresh water. His own water supply came from a well which the brethren had dug at his bidding in the rocky floor of his own house. Their pious minds thankfully acknowledged the lovingkindness of God, not only in the fact that they thus tapped a spring, but in the constant level maintained by the water. The well never ran dry nor overflowed.

Two remarkable incidents of Cuthbert's building operations impressed themselves indelibly on the minds of his helpers. Four of them were one day bidden to bring him on a truck a huge stone which lay in a distant part of the islet. They found it so heavy that, fearing to break the truck or overstrain themselves, they left it in the middle of the road. Next time they visited their beloved master, the sight of that stone fitted to its place drew from them an exclamation of praise to God who could work so mightily

in his chosen servants. Another day he asked a party of brethren who were visiting him for a joist twelve feet long, to bridge a chasm worn by waves in the rocky border, over which he proposed to build a hut close to his brother mystic, the sea. One such chasm, perhaps the same, is now called St Cuthbert's Gut. They forgot all about the joist and returned on the appointed day empty-handed. Seeing how distressed they were at being reminded of their carelessness, Cuthbert soothed them with gentle words and bade them spend a night on the islet. In the morning they found, at the very foot of the rock that needed filling, a log of the required length, which had been washed ashore while they slept.

At first, whenever any of his brethren visited him, he used to leave his cell and serve them by washing their feet with warm water. Sometimes they prevailed on him to accept the same service from them. So far was his mind withdrawn from the care of his body and so wholly given to spiritual realities that his leathern shoes were not taken off for months at a time and even, so it was said, remained on his feet from one Maundy Thursday till the next.

He began by receiving his scanty ration of bread from the brethren, but afterwards thought it fitter to live by the labour of his own hands. When he had failed to grow wheat, he tried barley; and, if that experiment had also failed, he would have bowed to God's will by ceasing to be an anchorite and again becoming a cenobite in the monastery. Though however the barley was sown much later than usual, the crop was so abundant that he felt reassured of God's favour. As it was ripening, numerous jackdaws settled on it and fed greedily. 'Why touch ye,' pleaded Cuthbert, 'a crop which ye did not sow? Is your need, perchance, greater than mine? If ye have God's leave, do His bidding; but if not, be off and cease to spoil what is not yours!' At the word they all flew away and ever afterwards left his barley undisturbed. This was one of the merry tales

he used to tell those whose failing faith needed strengthening by examples of what faith can do.

Another of his tales set the lowly obedience of birds in strong contrast to the stubborn pride of men. Farne had long been the home of a pair of ravens. One day Cuthbert saw them tearing with their beaks the thatched roof of his guest-house and carrying off wisps of straw to build their nest. In vain did he make with his right hand a gesture of disapproval. 'In the name of Jesus Christ,' he therefore shouted, 'begone at once and do no more damage!' Hardly had the words passed his lips when they flew crestfallen away. Three days later the female bird returned, found Cuthbert digging and grovelled with outspread wings in the furrow at his feet, croaking piteously. Those clear signs of penitence won them leave to return to their old home. In token of gratitude they brought in their beaks and laid at Cuthbert's feet a large lump of hog's lard, which greased the shoes of his visitors for a whole year.

From time immemorial Farne and the adjacent islets have been a favourite breeding ground of the eider duck, called by naturalists the Cuthbert duck. The tradition may well be true that these harmless and peace-loving birds owe to Cuthbert, who found them wild, their remarkable tameness during the breeding season. To those who joyfully saw the ready obedience rendered to Cuthbert not only by the creatures that dwell in air and sea, but by the sea itself and the winds, it seemed the natural consequence of his purity of heart in obeying the Creator. Only by sinful self-indulgence, so they thought, has man forfeited his proper lordship over all that lives and moves.

Besides the Lindisfarne brethren Cuthbert had many other visitors. Not only from the neighbourhood but from every quarter of Britain the fame of his holiness drew the weary and heavy-laden. None left his gracious presence unrefreshed. The conscience-stricken poured into his ears the ugly secrets of their aching hearts and were taught, by wise



and gentle counsel, how to recover for themselves the peace and joy which shone from his face into theirs. Those who felt ready to faint, under their burden of the troubles and cares which are the common lot of mankind, were reminded how slight and trifling, compared with eternal realities, are worldly prosperity and adversity. His own experience had taught him how manifold and cunning are the wiles of Satan. He could therefore assure the sorely tempted that the adversary of mankind prevails only over the man in whose heart dwells love neither of his fellow men nor of God; but that, to the man whose robust faith wins aid from above, his crafty snares seem as flimsy as a spider's web.

Of his own struggles against the special temptations of solitude, which seemed due to the fiendish malice of malevolent beings, he could only speak in metaphor:

'How often have they hurled me headlong from the lofty cliff! How often tried to kill me by aiming stones! But though they have, by every kind of illusion, sought to frighten me away and turn me out of this scene of my conflict, hitherto they have failed to inflict any injury on my body or to taint my mind with fear.'

Two or three years after his retirement, under stress of his hunger and thirst for what seemed to him perfection, he shut himself up so completely that he seldom conversed with visitors, and then only through a window. He was nevertheless, at the beginning of this period of stricter seclusion, glad to see and be seen by the Lindisfarne brothers to whom he talked; but later, even the window was never opened except for the sake of pronouncing his blessing, or for some other urgent cause. Yet he was far from regarding as a pattern for others this utter loneliness of life, this persistent quest of initiation into occult mysteries. Some misgiving even as to its especial fitness for himself may lie behind his reported remarks to the brethren:

‘Marvel not at the retired life that pleases me better than worldly cares, as though it lay on a higher plane of holiness than yours. At the life of cenobites ye may well marvel, for they are altogether subject to the abbot’s order, must watch, pray, fast and work when he chooses; most of them I feel sure are far ahead of me both in cleanliness of thought and penetrating clearness of prophetic insight. Assuredly Boisil was so, that most venerable bondservant of Christ, who fostered me in my youth at Melrose, and truly foretold all my destined lot. There remains however one of his prophecies which will, I hope, never be fulfilled. Let me assure you, my brothers, that, even though I am hiding myself on this rock, where swelling waves surround me on every side and shut me off both from sight and ken of all mankind, yet not even here do I deem myself free from the snares of the deceitful world, but fear lest, somehow or other, greed of gain may tempt me to my ruin.’

One Christmas Day some of the brethren came and begged him to leave his hut in order to keep the festival in their company with due gaiety. He yielded and shared their festal meal, but clouded their joy by beseeching them to be wary and watchful, lest through heedlessness and overweening confidence they might be led into temptation. In their turn they besought him to let them make merry as befitted the day. ‘Aye, let us make merry,’ he replied. After the table was cleared, when mirth and story-telling were in full swing, he provoked a second smiling protest by bidding them be alert in watchful prayer and ready to meet every onset of adversity. But when, for the third time, while their fun was at its height, the solemn warning was repeated, they knew there must be good reason for it and looked one at another in dismay. To their anxious enquiry Cuthbert could give no more definite answer than that he had a vague presentiment of a coming storm of trouble, the suddenness of which might severely strain their soul gear. On their return to Lindisfarne they found one of their comrades already dead of the plague. So ruthlessly did it

spread among them for nearly a year that, by a common stroke of destiny, nearly all the members, both senior and junior, of that holy brotherhood passed through the gate of death into the presence of their Lord. That Yuletide may probably be assigned to the year 680.

A stranger story of his prophetic power is assigned by his earliest biographer to the missionary journey in Teesdale which has been mentioned on page 178 of this volume. While he was, in some homestead, teaching with his usual care, he suddenly broke the thread of his discourse by exclaiming:

‘My dearest brethen, if any sudden temptation of the Devil presenteth itself outside, stand ye firm and let no mocking illusion draw you away from hearing the Word of God.’

Soon after he had resumed his theme, they heard flames roaring and men shouting as though a neighbour’s house were on fire. Out of doors they then rushed pell-mell to the rescue, all but a few whom Cuthbert held back by main force. Seeing not even a puff of smoke they began to feel ashamed that they had been so heedless of the preacher’s warning. Crestfallen they returned, fell on their knees before him and were gladly forgiven. They had, they assured him, learnt their lesson, namely that men are led spiritually astray by cunningly devised allurements of the senses.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### WILFRITH PROVOKING NEMESIS

Il est en outre le précurseur des grands prélats, des grands moines, des princes abbés du moyen age, chefs ou oracles des assemblées, ministres ou lieutenants des rois, quelquefois leurs égaux ou leurs rivaux.

Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident*, iv, 581.

**T**HOUGH Wilfrith lavishly gratified his taste for splendid buildings, he was none the less active in his pastoral duties. With untiring zeal and energy, so Eddi assures us, he rode everywhither ordaining, confirming and baptizing. By appointing to village churches resident priests and deacons he inaugurated a parochial system. On one occasion, quite early in his episcopate, a wailing mother presented for baptism a babe, her first-born son, who had fallen into a deathlike swoon. Having revived him by prayer and laying on of hands, the bishop baptized him, named him Eodwald and gave him back to the gladdened mother, bidding her deliver him up in his seventh year to be dedicated, like Samuel, to God. When the time came, instead of obeying, she followed her husband's advice by fleeing out of the diocese with her son, who was just such a comely little fellow as Wilfrith himself had been. One of the bishop's stewards, named Hocca, was sent in pursuit, found her hiding-place among the Welsh, forcibly took the boy from her and delivered him to his preserver. Thus ruthlessly, we may infer, did Wilfrith deal with all who tried to thwart him. Eodwald was afterwards regarded as the bishop's own son and lived by rule at Ripon till he died of the plague.

Of Wilfrith's ascetic habits we are told that, however thirsty he might be and however small the mug set before

him at a meal, he never drained it dry; also that, in winter and summer alike, he always bathed at bedtime in cold water until, in the course of his third and last visit to Rome, pope John VI bade him be more merciful to his aged body. His serenely cheerful look and merry talk made every one rejoice in the sunshine of his presence. Abbots and abbesses ensured the integrity of their possessions by vesting them in his name as trustee during their lifetime and as heir after their death. Ealdormen and thanes gave him their sons to train and afterwards left the lads free to choose between cloister and camp. In public the bishop magnified his office by lavish display; his numerous travelling escort was no less sumptuously clad and equipped than the king's bodyguard. This was enough by itself to make Ecgfrith jealous, even if he owed Wilfrith no grudge; and his jealousy was inevitably fomented, both by talebearers who also disliked such unseemly pomp, and by his enemy in chief, queen Eormenburh. Even so, nearly nine centuries later, did Anne Boleyn contrive the downfall of Thomas Wolsey.

The fifth canon of the ecumenical Council held in the year 325 at Nicaea enacted that the bishops of a province were to meet in synod twice a year for the settlement of disputes and of all questions which affected the whole province. Theodore can hardly be blamed for waiting four years before he obeyed this decree. When he entered on his arduous task the only bishop in England besides the pair of rivals, Chad and Wilfrith, was Wini, who, for some unrecorded reason, had been driven out of Wessex by Cenwealh and had, in the year 666, to the shame of both parties, bought the see of London from Wulfhere. Whether summoned or not, he was absent from the first synod of the province of Canterbury, which met at Hertford on September 24, 673. Four bishops, who had been consecrated by Theodore, attended in person. One of them, Putta of Rochester, had first been ordained priest in Kent by Wilfrith. The other three were Bisi of Dunwich, Lothair of

Winchester and Wynfrith of Lichfield. Wilfrith merely sent delegates; neither their number nor their names are on record. He must have known that, three quarters of a century earlier, pope Gregory the Great had prematurely conferred metropolitan dignity on the see of York and that, in the middle of the interval, a pallium had been sent, too late as it happened, by pope Honorius I to bishop Paulin. At the very moment when he received Theodore's summons to the synod, he may quite possibly have been intriguing through his friend, archdeacon Boniface, to obtain from Deus-dedit II, who had succeeded Vitalian in 672, the pallium which would make him independent of Vitalian's nominee. If so, it is easy to understand his unwillingness to take his place among Theodore's suffragans.

Of the ten canons of church discipline, carefully compiled from existing sources with special reference to the needs of England, and submitted by Theodore to the synod, all were carried except the ninth, which nevertheless is clearly recorded as follows:

‘That, as the number of the faithful increases, more men be promoted to bishoprics. About this matter, for the time being, we said nothing.’

Much doubtless had been said in the discussion but nothing decided. In spite of its wisdom, the proposal had been defeated by the opposition of power-loving suffragans, each of whom wished his diocese to be co-extensive with a kingdom. From the trend of later events it may fairly be inferred that the opposition was led by Wilfrith's delegates. Theodore was, however, so firmly convinced of the rightness of his policy that no scruple hindered him from playing the beneficent despot. In East Anglia the path of reform was smoothed by the failing health of Bisi. After the tiring double journey to and from the synod he felt so worn out that he resigned before the end of the year. His diocese was then, doubtless with the consent of Anna's nephew, king

Aldwulf, halved by Theodore, the other see being placed at North Elmham, near the middle of Norfolk. The new bishops were Acci and Badwine.

Turning his attention next to Mercia, Theodore deposed Wynfrith for some unspecified fault of disobedience. A worthy successor was easily found in the builder and abbot of a monastery which had, under the auspices of Oswiu and Peada, been dedicated to the Saviour and St Peter. His name was Saxulf; the site was then called Medeshamsted, which means a dwelling-place among meadows, and is now called Peterborough. Wynfrith meekly retired to the monastery founded by Chad at Barrow in Lindsey. The division however of the Mercian diocese, which had probably been the bone of contention between bishop and archbishop, was postponed by the course of events. The defeat already described of Wulfhere by Ecgfrith had the effect of lopping Lindsey off Saxulf's diocese and adding it to Wilfrith's. Then followed, in the year 675, the death of Wulfhere and the accession of his brother Ethelred, Penda's third son. As though in emulation of his father, but perhaps under constraint of the witan who had elected him, he savagely raided Kent in the second year of his reign. His ruffian troops desecrated churches and monasteries. The city of Rochester was destroyed. Bishop Putta was then absent from the see, teaching church music elsewhere. When he heard of the dire havoc, he felt so sick at heart that he made no attempt to resume his episcopal authority but sought shelter under the wing of Saxulf and received from him a parish church with adjacent glebe, suitable to his shyness and simple tastes. He had too little of the worldly wisdom needed by a bishop in those rough times but was highly proficient in ecclesiastical lore and a finished master of antiphonal chanting. Without neglecting his new duties, he travelled whithersoever he was invited to teach church music.

After he had sheathed his sword Ethelred so loyally sup-

ported Theodore that, by the end of the decade, there were in Mercia the three new sees of Hereford, Worcester and Leicester. In consequence of the defeat of Ecgrith in the battle of Elford-on-Trent, Lindsey was restored to Mercia and formed a separate diocese, the see being placed at Sidnacester, which has been identified with Stow, a village between Gainsborough and Lincoln.

When, in the year 678, Theodore was free to deal with Northumbria, Wilfrith had for more than three years been ruling, or pretending to rule, a diocese which extended from the Wash to the Firth of Tay. He was in the prime of life, keenly enjoying the constant exercise of unbounded authority, little dreaming of the Nemesis that was then close at his heels. One day, we may imagine, while he rode, chatting with his usual gaiety at the head of his cavalcade, out of a distant cloud of dust emerged a galloping horseman, bringing from York the ominous tidings that he was ousted from that see. So suddenly at least did the blow fall. That he had been weighed in the balance and found wanting may well have been the opinion of all Northumbrian Christians who were old enough to remember and wise enough to prefer the apostolic simplicity of Aidan, Finan and Colman. Not only Theodore but the abbess Hild agreed with Ecgrith in desiring a change. Accordingly, out of Northumbria were formed two dioceses, corresponding to the ancient division of the kingdom. The northerly was entrusted to Eata, the well-beloved abbot of Lindisfarne and Melrose, the southerly to Bosa, one of the Whitby monks. The see of Eata was interchangeably Hexham or Lindisfarne, Bosa's was York. Lindsey was entrusted to Eadhed, the court chaplain who had accompanied Chad southward in search of consecrators; but, when Lindsey was reconquered by Ethelred in the following year, 679, Eadhed retired to Ripon. Three years later, in 681, the northern diocese was subdivided into three, the new sees being Abercorn for the Fifeshire Picts and Hexham for southern



Bernicia. The new bishop of Abercorn was Tuma or Trumwine, whose earlier life is not recorded; and of Hexham Tunberht or Trumbriht, who had been third abbot of Gilling. Eata retained northern Bernicia as his diocese and Lindisfarne as his only see. '

Wilfrith's anger found vent in the king's council hall. Before the assembled witan he demanded why, though guilty of no crime, he was thus robbed of wealth and dignity which had, for the honour of God, been conferred on him by former kings. ' No breach of law, no harmful wrong-doing do we lay to thy charge, yet we change not our dooms,' was the joint answer of king and archbishop. When he had turned his back on the king's bench, mocking laughter followed him to the door. Before he passed out he aimed a parting thrust:

' A year hence ye who now scoff will weep ! '

Surely enough, on that very day in the following year, 679, the corpse of young Alfwin was borne into York, amid a throng of wailing mourners. He had been slain on the battlefield by the Trent where Ecgrith suffered his first defeat, and which was called after him Alfwinesford, the modern Elford, near Tamworth. The consequent bloodfeud would have embittered and prolonged the war if Theodore had not persuaded the avenger of blood to accept, and Ethelred to pay, the customary wergild or money fine. Though only eighteen years old, Alfwin had been ruling Deira as sub-king and was no less beloved by the Mercian subjects of his elder sister Osthryth than by his own. She may well have been wedded to Ethelred in her father's lifetime, but there is no record of the event. '

Among the wounded in that battle was a young thane of Ecgrith's bodyguard, named Imma. The rest of the day and the following night, he lay senseless among the corpses of the slain, then revived and did what he could to staunch his wounds. Before he could get clear away a party of Mercians caught him and took him to their lord, a companion thane

of Ethelred. Meanwhile, hearing that he was among the slain, his brother Tunna, the priest abbot of a monastery which was the nucleus of Tunnanceaster, the modern Towcester, had sought and found on the battlefield a corpse he mistook for Imma's, then bore it to that minster, gave it honourable burial and began to chant frequent masses for the release of his soul.

Fearing to declare his rank, Imma told his captors that he had merely fetched and carried victuals for the defeated army. The Mercian thane therefore spared his life, yet ordered him to be bound that he might not escape. No sooner however was he fast bound than the bonds began to slacken. His warders therefore suspected that he had in his possession a 'charm for loosing,' scratched in runes on a wooden stave, but he assured them that Tunna's masses, which he guessed were being chanted, must be releasing his body instead of his soul. His bearing and speech at last so belied his account of himself that, by promising to do him no harm, the thane made him in private tell the truth. 'Death at my hands,' then quoth the duped captor, 'is no more than thou deservest, for all my brothers and kindred fell in that battle, yet will I not break faith.' A Frisian to whom Imma was next sold in London, finding that his bonds always gave way at the hour of mass, let him go in search of ransom. He therefore introduced himself to Lothair, king of Kent, as a former thane of queen Athelthryth, Lothair's aunt, and did not beg in vain for the price of his release. Some of the many Northumbrians to whom Imma told this tale themselves passed it on to Beda. Its effect on most of its hearers was to increase their faith in the magical power of the holy housel.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

FOUNDERS OF WEARMOUTH AND JARROW  
(BENEDICT BISCOP, CEOLFRITH, EOSTERWINI,  
SIGEFRITH)

As God made Society to rest on the basis of the Family, so St Benedict saw that the spiritual family is the surest basis for the sanctification of the souls of his monks. . . . The whole spirit is homely. The monks trust their abbot. . . . He loves them and has confidence in them.

E. L. Taunton, *The English Black Monks of St Benedict*, I, 32, 33.

**A**BBOT JOHN not only taught the choir of Wearmouth and the singers who came thither to learn from nearly all the other monasteries of Northumbria, but accepted many invitations to teach elsewhere. Among his guests or hosts were, doubtless, the veteran James, precentor of York, and Stephen Eddi, the precursor of Boswell in his adoration of Wilfrith. Another duty had been entrusted to him by the Pope, namely, to make careful enquiry into English orthodoxy and bring back his report to Rome. Accordingly, John took with him to Wearmouth the canons of the Lateran Council held by pope Martin in the year 649, and had them copied there for distribution. As papal commissary he produced them at the memorable council, summoned by order of the kings of Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and Kent, which met at Hatfield in Herts under the presidency of Theodore on September 17, 680. With him sat the other bishops of Britain, but their names are not recorded. Wilfrith, the disdainer of the council held seven years earlier at Hertford, was hindered by durance vile from taking the place awarded him by papal authority; so grim was the humour of his Nemesis. In accordance with the custom of ecumenical councils a

book of the Gospels was placed on a desk in the midst of the assembly. The record of the proceedings runs as follows:

‘Handling the subject as peers (*pariter*) we expounded the right and orthodox faith, even as our incarnate Lord Jesus Christ delivered it to his disciples, who saw him really present and heard his discourse; as the creed also of the holy fathers has delivered, and generally all holy and ecumenical councils, the whole choir of credible teachers of the Catholic Church. Following them therefore in the way of piety and orthodoxy, according to their divinely inspired teaching, we profess our belief in harmony with theirs and confess after those holy fathers that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are properly and verily a consubstantial Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity; that is One God in three consubstantial Beings or Persons, of equal glory and honour.’

After much more to the same effect, which Beda omits, the record concludes by formally accepting the canons, not only of the first five ecumenical councils but of Martin’s Lateran Council. Soon after he had crossed the channel with a copy of this report, the abbot and precentor fell ill and breathed his last. Mindful of his promise, his companions bore his body as far as Tours for honourable burial near the patron of his monastery. His copy of the report was duly delivered to the Pope and highly gratified all who read it or listened to its readers.

Delighted with the fruitfulness of his first donation and with Biscop’s beneficent activity, Ecgfrith gave him, in the year 681, ‘for the ransom of his own soul,’ forty hides at Jarrow, three miles up the Tyne, on its right bank, and about six from Wearmouth. The name, originally Gyrwy, describes the marshlike smoothness of the Slake, or sleek estuary, which afforded safe mooring to ships. There, on the high ground which enfolded that haven, Biscop built another monastery in honour of St Paul and

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colonized it with a party of Wearmouth brethren, twenty-two according to the nameless writer, seventeen according to Beda. The discrepancy may be due to the misreading by some scribe of a Roman numeral. Of the twenty-two only ten were already tonsured, the other twelve were unproved novices. By no means all of them could sing psalms, far less read service books or join in the antiphonal responses. But their devotional spirit helped them onward; so did the example and eager insistence of their zealous ruler Ceolfrith, who used to eat, sleep and observe the seven canonical hours of prayer in their company, in order that, whether a rebuke or a lesson were needed, he might himself complete the training of every novice. Thus faithfully, patiently and tactfully did he cause the tender plant of monastic discipline to strike its roots deep in the fertile soil of rugged, wilful and passionate temperaments.

The two houses were separate only in place but one in ritual and organization as well as in brotherly fellowship. The dedication of Jarrow on Sunday, April 23, 685, is thus recorded on a memorial stone which the wrack of time has spared:

✠ DEDICATIO BASILICAE  
SCI PAULI VIII KL MAII  
ANNO XV EGFRIDI REG  
CEOLFRIDI ABB EIUSDEMQUE  
Q. ECCLES DEO AUCTORE  
CONDITORIS ANNO IIII

As Ceolfrith at Jarrow, so was Eosterwini Biscop's lieutenant at Wearmouth, not because one and the same monastery could have or ought to have two abbots, but because Biscop's ripe wisdom caused him to be so often summoned by the king to advise on affairs of state that he could not wrap himself up in the absorbing cares of his own domain. In his new dignity Eosterwini's charming simplicity of character shone more brightly than ever. Though gentle, affable and kind to all, he was quick to





ST. PETER'S, MONKWEARMOUTH



ST. PAUL'S, JARROW

check breaches of discipline; but his inborn habit of loving sympathy made it easy for him to prevent, by a timely warning, misconduct which might have clouded with vexation his beaming countenance. Whithersoever the affairs of the monastery took him he used often to find some brethren at work and would at once join them, guiding the ploughshare in its furrow, shaking the winnowing fork, or beating out iron on the anvil. He continued to sleep in the common dormitory and shared in the refectory the common fare of the meaner brethren.

In the year 684, desiring to equip Jarrow as fully as Wearmouth, Bishop started on his fifth and last pilgrimage, in search of such books and pictures as could be bought only in Rome, and returned heavily laden about two years later. In the interval the bubonic plague was again epidemic in Britain and made sad havoc among his double family. Jarrow became so desolate that none was left who could read, preach or even chant, except the abbot himself and his young pupil Beda, then thirteen years old. Deeply distressed, Ceolfrith decided to omit, except at vespers and matins, the refrains, called antiphons, which were usually sung by the whole choir in the intervals of soloist psalmody. The omission caused many a tear to roll down his cheeks and many a moan to pass his lips, as his own bass and Beda's treble awoke dreary echoes in the almost empty church. At the end of a week he could endure it no longer and restored the full course. It was hard work for two voices, but he lost no time and spared no pains in training some and collecting others to form a new choir.

'To the medieval monk,' truly remarks R. E. Prothero, 'the choir was the garden of the Lord, in which he laboured day and night; it was his paradise, where, in the cool shadow cast by his Redeemer, he might rest from the burning heat of the world. As the tide of psalmody rolled forth, night and day, from convent or monastery, and swelled over hill



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and fen, midnight wayfarers, travelling in fear of their lives, felt that they were in the hands of God; and labourers, rising to their work at dawn, or resting at noon, or returning with night, knew, though they understood not the words, that their toil was consecrated in the sight of their heavenly Father.'

At Wearmouth the victims of the pestilence included abbot Eosterwini. For two nights after he felt no doubt of his doom, he slept as usual in the dormitory, then shut himself up in a separate cell. On the seventh day he came out, sat in the open, assembled all the brethren round him and compassionately kissed the tears on their cheeks, as they bewailed the impending loss of so kind a father. Soon after midnight, on March 7, 686, while they were chanting the matutinal psalms, he fled away. Twelve years, one third of his brief life, had been happily spent in spiritual warfare. An equally devout, learned and gentle Wearmouth deacon named Sigefrith was chosen to succeed him. His efforts to keep vigour of mind and purity of heart were nobly sustained under the pressure of a weakening and incurable disease of the lungs.

The sadness of Biscop's homecoming was increased by the tragic fate of the king, described on pages 297, 298, but mitigated by the promotion of so worthy a friend to the vacant abbacy. His abundant collection of religious books was matched in value by many fine pictures. Besides enough to cover the walls of a church he had built at Wearmouth in honour of the Blessed Virgin, there was a whole series for the church of St Paul at Jarrow, specially designed to set in a clear light the harmony between the Old Covenant and the New. Side by side, for instance, with Isaac carrying the wood on which he was to become a burnt offering appeared Jesus bearing His own cross; and beside the serpent lifted up by Moses in the wilderness appeared the Son of Man lifted up on that cross. Among Biscop's other treasures were two cunningly woven silken robes

(*pallia oloserica*), with which he afterwards bought from king Aldfrith and his witenagemot three hides of folk-land on the right bank of the Wear, near its mouth. He also agreed to give that king, in exchange for eight hides of land by a stream then called the Fresh, a magnificently executed volume of cosmography. The transaction was proceeding when he died, and was completed by Ceolfrith. The land was assigned to the Pauline community at Jarrow.

Soon afterwards, worn out perhaps by his unceasing and strenuous exertions, also by the severe hardships which in those days fell to the lot of travellers, Biscop was disabled by a creeping palsy which entirely deprived him of the use of his lower limbs but enabled him to add patience to his other virtues. For three years he bore it cheerfully, never ceasing to praise God and bestow fatherly counsel on his family. At night, when he could not sleep, he listened to the reading of the book of Job, or other comforting passages of Scripture. As he could not rise to pray, he summoned a few of the brethren to his bedside at every canonical hour and, though he had not full use of tongue or voice, joined as well as he was able in their antiphonal psalmody.

In course of time Sigefrith's disease also confined him to bed and thus warned him that his end was nigh. On May 12, 689, he was therefore borne on a litter to Biscop's cubicle and lifted upon the bed. So helpless were both sufferers that, though their heads lay on the same pillow, they could not, without the aid of loving hands, have exchanged a farewell kiss. Before they parted Biscop appointed, by agreement with him and the whole brotherhood, his co-abbot Ceolfrith to be abbot of Wearmouth as well as of Jarrow. On the following August 22 Sigefrith passed happily away, as Beda quaintly puts it, from the fire and water of temporal tribulation, into the cooling atmosphere of perpetual peace. Five months later, on January 12, 690,

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Biscop followed him. Towards the end he earnestly besought all who called him father never to let his magnificent library gather dust and vermin or be dispersed. He also insisted that merit not birth should determine their choice of abbots. 'Far better were it,' quoth he, 'that this fair home of ours become for ever desolate than be ruled by my brother in blood, who walketh not in the way of truth.' After the election of a new abbot they were to summon a bishop for his consecration. All through the night in which he died some of the brethren were praying and chanting in church; the rest were watching by his bedside and listening with him to passages of the gospels read by a priest. Among the appointed psalms was the eighty-third, which Beda interprets as meaning that the foes of Christ, whether carnal or spiritual, are always trying to ruin His Church and every holy soul, but will be utterly baffled and routed by the Most High. Biscop's body was entombed in St Peter's Church, eastward of the high altar.

In the year 688, while Biscop lay ill, Ceolfrið entertained no less distinguished a guest than Adamnan, the ninth abbot of Iona, who was then for the second time Bruide's ambassador to Aldfrith. His wisdom, learning and devout humility filled the whole community with joyful wonder. He was easily persuaded to change his tonsure and adopt the catholic reckoning of Easter. He afterwards persuaded the northern Scots to follow his example, all except his own family at Iona and elsewhere, who may fairly be regarded as the precursors of the no less unreasonably obstinate Wee Frees.

To Aldfrith Adamnan gave a copy of his tract on the Holy Places of Palestine, the source of which is thus described in a prologue:

'The holy bishop Arculf, a native of Gaul, sojourned nine months in Jerusalem and made daily excursions thence to other places; to me Adamnan he dictated what is here faithfully recorded.'

From Beda, who quotes largely from the book, we learn that this bold traveller had not only explored the whole of Palestine but also visited Damascus, Constantinople, Alexandria and the islands of the Mediterranean. His guide and interpreter, a Burgundian monk named Peter, seems to have been the prototype of his class; for no sooner was the good bishop beginning to feel at home in one place than he was hustled on to the next. Having been driven by a storm out of his homeward course on to the western coast of Britain, he found at Iona a hearty welcome and an eager listener. The epilogue to the Tract tells, in a few expressive Pauline words, how heavy was the abbot's burden:

‘ All day long from every quarter the thronging cares of the churches crowd in upon me and load me with almost unbearable toil. Nevertheless, without leaving my post of duty, I have written this narrative in language all too poor for the subject.’

To the interval between 692 and 697 may probably be assigned Adamnan's greatest work, the account of Columkille, drawn partly from written sources, partly from oral testimony. He transferred to his own pages the life written by his predecessor Cummin the Fair. His work is divided into three books, which deal, not with the saint's life as a whole, but only with his *virtutes*. The first, in 50 chapters, graphically describes events foretold by Columkille, so distant in space or future time that the spiritual vision needed passes the bounds of ordinary human experience. The second book, in 46 chapters, claims for its hero not less might in deed than in word. The third, in 23 chapters, describes the occasions on which messages were delivered by visionary angels, either to the saint about others or to others about himself. The oldest extant copy of this work was found, in the year 1845, at the bottom of a chest, by Ferdinand Keller, while he was rummaging the town library of Schaffhausen. The scribe of that copy, Dorbene, was, in the year 713, elected tanist or coadjutor abbot of

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Iona and may therefore have written from the dictation of the author himself. In a chapter about the plague Adamnan says that, while it was raging elsewhere in Britain and Ireland, it left untouched the Picts and Scots who dwelt round the Grampians, although they were far from guiltless of such grave sins as commonly arouse the wrath of the Eternal Judge. To whom else, he asks, can this favour have been granted than to holy Columkille, whose monasteries lie within their boundaries and have always been held by them in high honour? He bemoans the stupid thanklessness of the many among both peoples who neither know nor care how much they owe to their patron's prayers. He also recalls his own thankfulness for the protection which kept him safe, not only on the Columbian islands but also during his two visits to Northumbria. Having kept in Ireland the catholic Easter of 704, Adamnan returned to Iona, made a last vain attempt to overcome the obstinacy of his own family of brethren, and died there on the following September 23, at the age of eighty. Thus, as Beda puts it, a devout lover of brotherly union and peace was spared the pain of discord which another Eastertide had in store for him. To his admirers he was ever the noble Sage of the Western Isles, who combined the virtues of patriarch and apostle.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### WILFRITH APPELLANT AND PRISONER

Dieu et mon droit ! cette fière devise de l'Angleterre est écrite à chaque page de la vie de Wilfrid.

Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident*, iv, 385.

**S**MARTING with resentment at his arbitrary deposition, Wilfrith took counsel with his friends and resolved to appeal to the only remaining tribunal; but the sequel showed that, so far from obtaining redress, he made a stupid blunder. With a chosen band of comrades he started for Rome in the summer of 678. The month of August was distinguished by the appearance in the sky of a large comet which, says the Chronicler, shone for three months every morning like a sunbeam. In this event each party doubtless discerned a portent of woe to the other.

A few years earlier, when his renown was at its height, Wilfrith had, by befriending a persecuted exile, incurred the enmity of Ebroin, the murderer of his adoptive father Aunemund. The exile's name was Dagobert. On the death, in the year 656, of his father, the devout Sigebert III, he was rightful king of Austrasia but was only three years old. Grimwald the Arnulfing, who, as mayor of the palace, had long enjoyed the reality of kingly power but wanted more, cut off the child's long hair and secretly sent him to Ireland in charge of Dido, bishop of Poitiers, the friend with whom he had carried Foillan's corpse into Nivelles. Swift retribution overtook this premature and treacherous attempt to thrust aside the degenerate Merwing dynasty. In the same year Grimwald was delivered by the Austrasian nobles to Clovis II, king of Neustria, who put him to death with torture. Dagobert was reared in the monastery of Slane, near Dublin, and had spent eighteen years there

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when his mother and friends besought Wilfrith to speed him homeward by way of York. Their leader and spokesman was Wulfwald, the Austrasian mayor of the palace, who hoped thus to put an end to the anarchy which had followed the murder, in September, 673, of Childeric II. With characteristic generosity Wilfrith made such strenuous efforts on behalf of the young prince that, before August, 674, he mounted his father's throne as Dagobert II. Thus cleverly, was defeated a scheme of the unscrupulous Ebroin to displace him in favour of a young man whom he called Clovis and falsely alleged to be a son of Clotchar III.

If therefore Wilfrith had landed at Etaples, in order to pass through Neustria, he would have fallen into the clutches of the detective agents whom Ebroin always maintained there on the look-out for his foes. By a strange mishap they caught instead Wynfrith, the deposed bishop of Lichfield, who was probably on his way to one of the Neustrian monasteries. Misled by his name they treated him as their proper victim, robbed him of his money, stripped him of his clothes and slew many of his escort. Perhaps by accident but probably by design, Wilfrith avoided Neustria by landing on the coast of Friesland. The Frisian king Adalgis gave him an honourable welcome and allowed him to preach. The hardy ancestors of medieval dyke-builders were engaged in a perpetual hand-to-hand struggle with the encroaching sea. According to Pliny the Elder, an inshore wind and a high tide so covered their land that they used to climb hillocks, which they had raised above the highest level of the water; looking, he says, like sailors aboard ship, and then, at the ebb, like shipwrecked men. They subsisted chiefly on the fish brought up by the tide and wove their fishing nets out of sea tangle and rushes. Sunshine was so scarce that they were compelled to dry in the wind the mud they used for fuel. During the autumn and winter Wilfrith shared their

hardships and patiently expounded to them day after day, with convincing earnestness, all the articles, one after another, of the Apostles' Creed. The haul of fish was larger that year than usual and the harvest unusually abundant. For both blessings the Frisian peasants thanked the stranger's God. Before the end of the year most of the chieftains and many thousand humbler folk professed faith in Christ and were baptized.

Baulked of his prey, Ebroin sent envoys to Adalgis, bearing a letter in which he bound himself by oath to pay that king a bushel of gold coins as the price of Wilfrith's living body or severed head. While the envoys were seated in full view of the populace, at a banquet spread for them in the palace, Adalgis ordered the reading of the letter in the hearing of Wilfrith, Eddi, and their companions. Then he took the scroll in his hands, tore it publicly asunder and tossed the fragments into the fire, startling the envoys with these indignant words:

'To your master this is my message. May the Creator of the Universe thus rend asunder the kingdom and reduce to ashes the life of him that breaks his plighted word!'

In the spring of 679 Wilfrith continued his journey and was heartily welcomed at Metz by the grateful Dagobert II. The important bishopric of Strassburg had lately fallen vacant and was urgently offered by the king to his guest, but firmly declined. Loaded with handsome gifts, the pilgrims then continued their journey, under the guidance of Adeodatus, bishop of Toul. Having crossed the Alps into Lombardy, they were hospitably received at Pavia by king Berctar, who had been in his youth, like Dagobert, persecuted by another Lombard king, also named Grimwald. To his guest after they had exchanged greetings, he spoke as follows:

'Thy enemies have sent me envoys offering a rich reward for thy detention, but I repudiated with scorn so



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wicked a proposal and said to them, Long ago, in the days of my youth, having been driven into exile from my native land, I dwelt in Pannonia with the Khan of the Avars. He swore by the idol he worshipped never to betray or surrender me to my foes. When, therefore, Grimwald's envoy arrived with a bushel of gold coins for him if he would but deliver me up to be slain, he answered, May the gods cleave my life in twain if I offend them by forswearing myself.

'How much less can I, who know the true God, thus forfeit my soul, even to gain the whole world!'

Having been, by his third royal host, furnished with fresh guides, Wilfrith and his party arrived safely at Rome. Pope Agatho had already been informed of dissension in the church of England by Theodore's envoy, a monk named Coenwald. A council of seventeen bishops and thirty-five priests met in October, 679, to help Agatho deal with the general question. The place of meeting was the famous Lateran basilica, the prototype of Canterbury Cathedral, from which, twenty-six years earlier, pope Martin I had been dragged to his doom. It was resolved that the full number of bishops in England be twelve, including the archbishop; that he might alone promote and consecrate suffragans; and that no bishop might encroach on another's jurisdiction. It was also resolved that neither bishops nor any other clergy might bear arms, maintain harpers or allow the performance in their presence of music, stage plays and buffoonery. The report of a committee appointed to consider Wilfrith's case was then presented by two cardinals, Andrew bishop of Ostia, and John bishop of Portus Romanus. His deposition was therein pronounced uncanonical and he was praised for self-restraint because he had not, in support of his rights, kindled the flame of civil war. Then quoth Agatho:

'Wilfrith stands outside the door and asks to be admitted with his petition. Bid him enter!'

After his entry the petition was, at his request, read

aloud by a notary named John. It alleged that his three successors had themselves, in a synod of bishops presided over by Theodore, done their utmost to rob him of his see. It laid the blame of the proceeding on personal enemies. It expressed his readiness to assent to a division of the diocese, if only the new bishops were chosen by a synod and so peaceably disposed that he could work in harmony with them. It stigmatized Bosa, Eadhed and Eata as quarrelsome foreigners, whose administration of their sees was harmful to the church of Northumbria. So far from truthful was Wilfrith in the pursuit of his own ends.

With one accord the Council decreed the ejection of the three intruders, the reinstatement of Wilfrith and the consecration by Theodore of assistant bishops chosen by Wilfrith and approved by a witenagemot assembled at York. For disobedience to this decree Theodore and his clergy were threatened with deposition and the direst cursing, Ecgrith and his subjects with excommunication and worse to follow in the great Day of Doom.

This transaction had been spread over five months, November, 679, to March, 680. On March 27 a council of 125 bishops assembled at Rome under pope Agatho, in preparation for the ecumenical council of Constantinople which, six months later, justified pope Martin by condemning the monothelite heresy. Each bishop bore witness to the orthodoxy of his own diocese. Theodore had been summoned but was not present. In his absence Wilfrith avowed the true catholicity of the faith held in North Britain, Ireland and the smaller islands inhabited by Angles, Kymry, Scots and Picts. He afterwards spent several days in going the round of the shrines and buying from their guardians 'for the comfort of the churches of Britain' a large collection of relics, each of which he labelled with the saint's name. He also bought, as usual, numerous church ornaments and then began, soon after Easter, his homeward journey.

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While he was crossing the Alps his friend Dagobert II was treacherously murdered by agents of Ebroin, with the ominous concurrence of certain bishops, one of whom led an armed force to meet and stop Wilfrith. Called to account for the aid he had rendered the hapless king, the threatened traveller used this effectual argumentum ad hominem:

‘What else, my lord bishop, couldest thou do if an exile of my race and of royal blood were to put himself at thy mercy?’

‘May the lord keep thy going out and thy coming in!’ quoted the bishop in answer. ‘Woe to me a sinner! Forgive me, for like the patriarch Judah I see that thou art much more righteous than I. The Lord be with thee, and the holy apostle Peter be thy helper!’ This bishop was perhaps Waimer, duke of Campania, who had been rewarded by Ebroin with a see for his share in the murder of St Leger.

Having thus again narrowly escaped falling into merciless clutches, Wilfrith made his way to York without further mishap and triumphantly showed the king his parchment scroll, signed by every member of the papal synod and loaded with dangling bulls. A full witenagemot assembled, bishops and abbots as well as ealdormen and thanes. The recent finding at Whitby of a leaden bull, inscribed with the name of Boniface, the papal archdeacon who had been Wilfrith’s earliest friend at Rome, makes it probable that the place of assembly was Hild’s monastery and that, when the decree had been read, its anathemas were set at naught by throwing the scroll out of the window into the kitchen midden. So contemptuously at least was it rejected, doubtless to the utter dismay of Wilfrith, who was even accused of having obtained it by bribery. That word was perhaps hardly too strong for the fees he had paid. His overweening presumption in preferring a foreign ruler to his own king was then punished by imprisonment. He was stripped of everything but his clothes and forbidden to receive the visits of his friends. His precious reliquary

was handed to the queen and hung either in her bedroom when she was at home or in her chariot when she drove abroad. His first custodian was Osfrith, the reeve of a royal vill named Bromnis, which may perhaps be identified with Broomridge in the parish Ford, county Northumberland. By the king's order he was confined in a dungeon all but sunless in daytime and pitchdark at night. Nevertheless, when his fearless midnight psalmody disturbed the slumbers of his awestruck gaolers, unearthly light seemed to them to shine through the chinks of his door. To Ecgrith's offer of part of his original diocese and abundant gifts of land, if he would but submit and confess that the papal decree was fraudulent, he boldly replied that he would rather let his head be severed from his body than abate one jot of an award which rested on apostolic authority. In course of time Osfrith's wife, named Ebbe, had a kind of paralytic stroke and seemed to be at death's door. Her alarmed husband hastily fetched the holy prisoner and besought his aid. After Wilfrith had, in the intervals of prayer, sprinkled her face and moistened her lips with consecrated water, she gradually recovered, and lived more than thirty years to tell the tale of her cure. The joyful reeve plucked up courage to inform the king that he would rather die than continue to imperil his soul by inflicting unjust punishment on the innocent bishop. Ecgrith's anger at this message caused him to commit Wilfrith to the custody of Tydlin, reeve of Dunbar, who had the reputation of being very stern and fierce. Even by him the king's order to bind the prisoner with iron fetters made to measure seems to have been cleverly evaded. Either the gyves were so small that they could not be fastened or so large that they fell from his feet when he was preaching and from his hands when he was baptizing. That his ministry was not only exercised but welcomed by rough men, in defiance of the king's orders, seems to prove that the tide of sympathy was turning in his favour.

In those days a king and his court only escaped starvation by making a continual round of the royal estates. In due time this regular progress brought Ecgfrith and Eormenburh to the neighbourhood of Coldingham, where they were graciously welcomed by his aunt, the abbess Abb. One night the queen fell ill with such strange symptoms that a demon seemed to have possessed her. In the morning her hostess found her apparently dying of convulsions, went straight to the king and plainly told him that she was being punished for their shameful treatment of Wilfrith and would surely die if their victim were not promptly set free to go whither he would. Her stinging words may well have found an echo in her nephew's guilty conscience. He released the prisoner, restored the relics and gave him leave to depart with his comrades from the realm of Northumbria. Eormenburh soon recovered health of both mind and body.

Wilfrith's imprisonment had lasted nine months and probably began before September 17, 680, the date on which a famous synod of bishops met at Hatfield in Herts to affirm the orthodoxy of the church of England. On November 17 in the same year died his adversary, the abbess Hild.

In or about the same year a party of monks from Medeshamsted or Peterborough settled at Brixworth and built for their abbey the basilica which is now used as the parish church. The disappearance of its aisles has made it more similar than it was originally to the ancient St Pancras Canterbury, St Andrew's Rochester and St Mary's Lyminge. Its triple eastern arch, however, differs from theirs by leading not into the apse itself but into an intermediate transept.

CHAPTER XXX  
CADMON OF WHITBY  
THE FATHER OF ENGLISH POETRY

Let us now praise famous men,

Such as sought out musical tunes  
And set forth verses in writing.

Ecclus. xliv. 1, 5.

**N**EAR Whitby, on the abbey estate, while Hild was abbess, dwelt an aged cowherd named Cadmon, who had never learnt any of the merry lays that used to be sung at the frequent ale feasts. Often therefore, as he saw the harp coming his way in its passage from one to another of his mates, he rose ashamed and went home. In course of time, on the night of one such feast, his turn came to guard the stable. Thither therefore he went after he had risen, lay down and fell asleep. In his dream he thus talked with a man who seemed to stand beside him and to greet him by name:

‘Cadmon, sing to me.’

‘Naught can I sing, and therefore came out from yon alefeast.’

‘Yet mayest thou sing.’

‘What must I sing?’

‘Sing me the beginning of all things.’

Thus bidden, he promptly sang, in praise of the Creator, alliterative verses he had never heard, as follows:

Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard,  
meotodes meahte and his modgethane,  
weorc wuldorfaeder, swa he wundra gehwaes,  
Ece Drihten, oord onstealde.  
He acrest sceop eorþan bearnum

heofon to hrofe, halig scyppend;  
tha middangeard monncynnes weard,  
ece Drihten, aefter teode  
firum foldan, frea aelmihtig.

(Now must we praise the guardian of the heavenly kingdom, the might of the Creator and the counsel of his mind, the works of the Father of glory, how He, the eternal Lord, formed the beginning of wonders. He first shaped for earth's children, heaven as a roof, the holy Shaper; then the guardian of mankind, the eternal Lord, the almighty ruler, afterwards fashioned the world, as a ground for men.)

On awaking Cadmon's mind kept fast hold of that dream lay and fashioned others like it. In the morning he told the steward whose orders he obeyed the strange tale of his newfound gift, and was led by him to the abbess. Gladdened by their news, Hild assembled her teachers and learners, then bade him tell the dream and sing the lay in their presence; in order that they might judge for themselves what it was worth and whence it came. All agreed that a heavenly gift had been bestowed by the Lord himself on their untaught neighbour. Then they put him to the test by relating a Bible story and bidding him versify it. He took the task home, returned on the morrow and recited so good a lay that the abbess was overjoyed. In obedience to her he willingly joined the brotherhood of monks and steadily learnt from his fellows the whole course of scriptural history. Though he could not read, his memory was retentive; so, like a clean beast chewing the cud, he turned all his lessons over and over in his mind till they were moulded into lays of such good quality that his teachers found it worth while to write the words as they fell from his lips and then to learn them. He sang, says Bede, first of the earth's creation, the beginning of man and all the story of Genesis; afterwards about the departure of the tribes of Israel from Egypt, their entry into the Land of Promise, and many events of their later history. Also about the

Incarnation, Passion and Ascension did he compose many a lay; about the coming of the Holy Ghost and the teaching of the apostles; about the Day of Doom, the terror of hell torment and the joys of the kingdom of heaven: earnestly striving in all to wean men from their sins and arouse in them love of goodness. His own piety and lowly obedience to the monastic rule were quite exemplary; and his wrath waxed hot against all who set that rule at naught. In the minds of many hearers his lays kindled a fire which burnt up all their low desires and filled them with a glow of heavenly life. After him many other Englishmen tried their hand at composing pious lays, but none succeeded so well as he.

A fortnight before the day of his departure he felt sore stricken with illness, yet could still speak and walk. On the evening of that day he bade his attendant prepare him a bed in the infirmary. The lad wondered why, but did as he was told. As the dying poet lay abed there he chattered gaily until midnight with the watchers, then asked:

‘Have ye in this house any housel?’

‘What need hast thou of housel?’ was their answer: ‘So blithely art thou talking to us that the time for thee to fare forth cannot be nigh.’

Again quoth he: ‘Bring me housel.’

Holding it in his hand, ‘Feel ye all,’ he asked, ‘at peace with me and quite free from illwill?’ Then, after they had assured him of their entire friendliness towards him and begged him to be equally kind to them,

‘My dear brethren,’ quoth he, ‘towards you and all who serve God I feel very friendly.’

So he fortified himself with heavenly food for his journey and prepared for his entry into another life.

‘How near,’ then asked he, ‘is the hour at which the brethren arise to praise God by chanting lauds?’

‘Not far off is that,’ was the answer.

‘Good,’ quoth he, ‘let us bide that hour.’



Then he prayed, signed himself with 'the token of Christ's rood,' laid his head on the bolster, fell asleep and thus quietly passed away. So it befell that the tranquillity of his death matched the pure and simple tranquillity of his devout life. And the tongue which had formed so many hallowing words in praise of the Creator thus glorified Him in the last words he uttered:

'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.'

In the Bodleian library is preserved a poetical paraphrase which was formerly attributed to Cadmon but is now believed to be the work of several poets who took their cue from him. The scriptural narratives paraphrased and amplified are Genesis, part of Exodus, part of Daniel and fragments of the New Testament, especially the descent of Christ into Hades. The dialect is West Saxon and the scribe probably lived in the eleventh century. The elaborate description of the Fall of Man largely expands the biblical story and closely resembles the narrative of *Paradise Lost*.

The year of Cadmon's death is unknown but was probably not much earlier or later than 680, the year of Hild's. His day in the Kalendar is February 11.

## CHAPTER XXXI

## CUTHBERT, BISHOP AND PATRON

L'humble anachorète, qui n'avait voulu vivre sur son rocher que du modeste produit de son labeur manuel, se trouvait avoir créé le bénéfice le plus riche, après Tolède, de toute la chrétienté.

Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident*, iv, 437.

**E**ARLY in the year 684 the deposition of bishop Tunberht by archbishop Theodore, for some fault of disobedience, vacated the see of Hexham. The dreaded prophecy of Boisil, confirming the infant's rebuke, was that Cuthbert would live to be a bishop. His own prophetic instinct now warned him that a struggle was at hand between his choice and his destiny. Later in that year, at the pressing invitation of Oswiu's daughter, the abbess Alfred, then thirty years old, he met her on Coquet Island, where there was probably a monastic settlement, and answered her many questions about the work to which both had been called. In the midst of their conference she suddenly fell on her knees and solemnly adjured him to tell her how long her brother, king Ecgrith, would live. Startled by her earnestness, yet unwilling to conceal his own presentiment, he first expressed surprise that so wise a woman and so well grounded in Holy Writ should apply the word long to human life. 'How much more unsuitable,' he continued, 'is the word to a life which is within a year of its end!'

Her feelings at the sad news found relief in a flood of tears. When she had dried her cheeks, she again, with womanly boldness, adjured him to tell her who would be the next king of Northumbria, since Ecgrith had no son. After a momentary silence he answered:

‘His successor will be one who, no less than he, feels the warmth of thy sisterly love.’

In answer to her inquiry where the man dwelt, he added:

‘Seest thou how full of islands is yon widespread sea! God can easily find on one of them a king to set over the Anglian realm.’

These two answers pointed clearly to her half-brother Aldfrith, who was then searching the scriptures on Iona; but the edge of her curiosity was not yet blunted. The rumour had reached her that Ecgrith regarded Cuthbert as the fittest man for the vacant see. Not daring to fire point blank, she advanced thus warily under cover:

‘How strangely varied are the objects on which men set their hearts! Some find their joy in piling up riches; others, though they love riches, are always needy. As for thee, if worldly renown lay in thy path, thou wouldest kick it aside. To a man no loftier meed of honour can be offered than a bishopric; yet to thee is dearer thy outlandish barricade.’

This crafty sally drew from Cuthbert the admission that in such a matter his own will must be overruled by God’s, but perchance for not more than two years.

In the autumn of that year a full witane-gemot of clergy and laity met for the election at Alnmouth or Twyford, on a spot afterwards called the Church Hill. Archbishop Theodore presided; by his side sat enthroned king Ecgrith, as equal in authority. Cuthbert was unanimously chosen. When despatch-bearing envoys had failed to draw him from his fortress, the king himself set sail for Farne, escorted by bishop Trumwine of Abercorn, and many other witan. From Lindisfarne also came many brethren on the same errand. All fell on their knees and, with tears streaming down their cheeks, earnestly besought him in the name of the Lord. Weeping in his turn, he suffered himself to be led forth from his beloved retreat and brought to their

meeting place. His reluctance was there overcome and his neck meekly bowed beneath the yoke; but his consecration was postponed, and he returned forthwith to Farne. Thence he was summoned to Melrose by bishop Eata, for a conference about the strategy and tactics of their common warfare. When he confided to his spiritual father his distress at the prospect of breaking the ties which had for twenty years bound him to Lindisfarne, Eata lovingly proposed an exchange of sees, to which king and archbishop afterwards consented.

The year 684 is also memorable for an appearance of the famous comet, now known as Halley's, which passed its perihelion on November 26 but is not mentioned by any English chronicler. In the year 66 it heralded the fall of Jerusalem, in 451 the death of Attila, in 1066 the invasion of England. On Trafalgar Day, 1909, shortly before these words were written, and 210 days before the calculated perihelion passage of 1910, it was observed about 10.15 p.m. by the Cambridge astronomers Newall and Hinks. If it was noticed by Cuthbert and Alfred, it must have seemed ominous of the events they discussed.

In that year also the comet saw much woe befall Ireland; first a deadly visitation of pestilence; then, while that was at its worst, a cruel and wanton invading force of Northumbrians, sent thither by Ecgfrith and commanded by one of his ealdormen named Berht. After spreading havoc far and wide through Magh Breg, the patrimonial territory of the Ard Ri Finnachta, between the Liffey and the Boyne, they were followed homeward by the curses of their victims. Montalembert calls this the first in the long series of unexpiated crimes committed by the English against the Irish; but it seems possible that Ecgfrith had been invited by the men of Leinster to help them shake off the galling yoke of the Boromean tribute. In recording the deplorable event Beda calls that nation 'harmless and ever most friendly to the English.' Two years later Adamnan, abbot

of Iona and anmchara or soulfriend of Finnachta, visited king Aldfrith and obtained the release of sixty Scots whom Berht had taken prisoner.

On his homeward journey from Melrose Cuthbert was met by one of Ecgrith's companion thanes named Tibba, who begged the bishop elect to turn aside and bless his homestead. The boon was of course willingly granted. The thane then ventured to tell Cuthbert that one of his bondsmen had long been lying in such a state of weakness and pain that he seemed at the point of death. The guest at once blessed a cup of water and sent it to the sick man. After the third draft he sank into sound slumber. Next morning his master found him quite well. The bearer of the water, Baldhelm, afterwards became a priest of Lindisfarne.

At last, on Easter Day, March 26, 685, Cuthbert was duly consecrated in St Peter's church at York by Theodore and six other bishops. Among them was doubtless Eata, who died of dysentery seven months later. The new bishop received from the king several grants of land; the first in York, from the wall of S. Peter's to the great gate westwards and the city wall southwards; the second the village Crayke, a convenient halting place on his journeys to and from York. Between city and village lay the great forest of Galtres. The third grant was far more valuable, the old Roman city of Lugubalium, which was built on the site of the more ancient Caer Luel and is now Carlisle; together with a surrounding belt of land fifteen miles wide. The fourth grant was the district of Cartmel in Lancashire, including the Welsh serfs who tilled the land. This was one of the districts which had formerly been granted to Wilfrith.

The next few weeks were clouded with public anxiety, the prelude to a grave national disaster. King Ecgrith determined to lead an army of invasion into the territory of the Picts, then ruled by king Bruide Mac Bili. To the pro-

tests of his friends and counsellors, including Cuthbert, he turned a deaf ear. His favourite counsellor, Benedict Biscop, was then abroad. Seeing his infatuation, men began gloomily to whisper one to another that the curses of his Irish victims might thus be driving him unawares to his doom. Queen Eormenburh retired to Carlisle and there awaited in her sister's convent the upshot of the expedition. Thither she was followed by Cuthbert, who wished to inspect his new domain. On the day after his arrival, Saturday May 29, at three o'clock in the afternoon, burghers headed by their reeve Paga were showing him their stately walls and conducting him to a vaulted fountain within the city, a remarkable piece of Roman workmanship. All were delighted thus to honour their new lord, who was attended by several of his clergy. As he leant on his staff, sudden distress of mind clouded his bright face and bent his gaze downward. After a while he stood erect, looked skyward, groaned deeply and muttered:

'Perchance even now the struggle is over!'

Among the bystanders was a priest who guessed what he meant and with unseemly haste asked whence he knew, but received the evasive answer:

'Seest thou not the strange tremor in the atmosphere? Who can follow in their track the dooms of God?'

Cuthbert at once returned to the convent and thus broke the news privately to the queen:

'Early on Monday, for on the Lord's day none may drive, start in thy chariot for the royal city, lest haply the king be slain. To-morrow I go to yonder monastery and dedicate a church, then forthwith I will follow thee.'

By the royal city he may have meant York, but more probably Bamborough. On the Sunday, after preaching, he thus prepared the brethren of that monastery for the coming shock:

'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong; lest perchance some sifting trial take you by surprise.'

He emphasized the warning by telling them that Yule-tide story. On Monday arrived with grim news a fugitive from the battlefield—Ecgrith and his host had crossed not only the Forth but also the Tay, and destroyed two strongholds; the opposing Picts had then, by feigned retreats, lured them into a defile near Forfar. There had fallen the Northumbrian king, with nearly all his men, on the very day and at the very hour when Cuthbert, standing by the well, staggered for a moment under the blow he had foreseen.

This battle of Dunnichen or Nechtansmere brought to a sudden end the wide overlordship which had been built up by Edwin, Oswald and Oswiu. Bishop Trumwine was compelled to abandon his missionary outpost at Abercorn. For his monks he found homes in various Northumbrian monasteries and then, with a few chosen companions, retired to Whitby. His presence was a source of strength to the young abbess; and his useful activity, during the remainder of his long life, was not confined to the precinct. The Picts not only shook off Northumbrian supremacy but became formidable to the dwellers in Lothian. The corpse of Ecgrith was, by favour of abbot Adamnan, honourably buried in Iona. The widowed queen took the veil of a nun. As Cuthbert had foretold to Alflred, her half-brother Aldfrith, the first of our scholar kings, was called to the vacant throne and showed practical vigour in keeping together his diminished realm.

As Cuthbert's own flock were the chief sufferers from the disaster, his truly apostolic ministrations were doubly welcome. Folk were shielded from harm by his constant prayers; their spiritual life was quickened by his wholesome lore and by the compelling force of his example. His influence was strong enough to rescue the poor and weak from their oppressors. The sad and faint-hearted found in him an unfailing consoler. On the other hand, he was strict in recalling to godly sorrow all whose joy had been tainted

with guilt. He seemed to know beforehand the character and special need of each striving Christian. His clear and winning words, together with the charm of his manner, added savoury relish to the strong and sometimes unpalatable meat of his wise counsel. So well stored was his memory that he needed no books. The noble patience with which he endured every outward vexation, whether of mind or body, bore, to all observers, convincing witness of his inward communion with God. Clearly, his nine lonely years had been far from wasted. How severely he was tortured by his ulcerating tumour, which was then twenty years old, may be dimly imagined.

His preaching was full of gentle dignity, his favourite topics being the preparation for the Gospel in the Law, the words of Jesus, the obligations of the Christian life. He doubtless enjoyed the pleasure of finding, on many a wild moor, old friends to whom he had ministered as prior, grown stronger in faith, hope and love. To some he may have recalled times of trial when, becoming spiritually aware of their needs on his bleak islet, he had brought them safe through by his prevailing intercession and thus, though absent, helped them better than by his cheery presence.

On one occasion, while this good shepherd was going the round of his sheepfolds, he came to the hilly and wooded centre of a wide region from whose hamlets many had assembled to be confirmed by the laying on of his hands. For lack of a church and fit buildings to receive the bishop and his train, tents had been spread for them on the high road. For the people themselves five shelters were constructed of boughs cut from the neighbouring woods. For two whole days Cuthbert preached the Word of Life and, by anointing neophytes with chrism he had blessed, symbolically bestowed on them the gift of the Holy Ghost. His ministrations were commended by a signal deed of power. A party of women brought to the entrance of the



wood, on a rude pallet, a lad whose strength had been sapped away by a long and painful illness. Halting there, they sent to the bishop a message of urgent entreaty that they might bring the sufferer into his presence to receive his blessing. Cuthbert gave them leave and bade all the bystanders withdraw to a distance. He then wielded his well proved weapons of prayer, blessed the patient and quickly banished a disease which had baffled the leeches. In that very hour the lad arose, ate food, thanked God and returned to the women. This event took place while Cuthbert was travelling northward from Hexham towards Wall. What business had brought him so far south as Hexham we can only guess; perhaps it was Eata's last illness, perhaps a desire to confer with John or Wilfrith. The truth of the story was vouched by one of his companions named Henna; the name of the region was then Alise.

Soon afterwards the Lothians were nearly depopulated by a visitation of the plague. Cuthbert redoubled his efforts to visit the sufferers, did his utmost to console the survivors and was careful not to leave the poorest hamlet until he felt sure that no mourner had been overlooked. On one occasion, in a village called Methilwong, he addressed his usual question to Tydi, his chaplain:

‘Is there anyone else hereabouts who needs us? or may we now pass on?’ After looking all around Tydi saw and pointed to a woman who stood out of earshot, holding a boy in her arms and weeping bitterly. When they came up to her they learnt that the plague had already robbed her of one son and saw how swollen was the body of the gasping sufferer she carried. Having blessed and kissed the boy, Cuthbert bade her neither fear nor mourn, for the child would recover and none else of her household would die of the plague. Both mother and son lived long to bear witness to the fulfilment of his prediction.

Thus in his closing years, did he lay in the hearts of his folk the foundations of that deep affection to which we

owe so many monuments of him throughout the Lowlands of Scotland and the North of England. His tenderness to children may be easily imagined and how, in later years, they told their children about his gentle and loving ways.

On the island of Derwentwater which still bears his name lived, in peaceful solitude, a priest named Herbert, who had long been in the habit of visiting once a year his dear friend Cuthbert. Their last meeting was at Carlisle, whither the bishop had been summoned for the veiling of queen Eormenburh and the ordaining of clergy. While the two friends were quaffing each the other's wine of spiritual wisdom, Cuthbert spoke thus:

‘Remember, brother Herbert, to ask me now whatever thou desirest to know, because after we have parted here we shall not again in this world look each on the other's face. Nigh is the hour for me to depart.’

The prospect of surviving the friend on whom he so closely depended was more than Herbert could bear; so he begged the bishop to pray that they might depart together. Cuthbert did so, prostrating himself with arms outstretched crosswise in token of his earnestness, and felt inwardly assured that his prayer was granted. In order, it was afterwards believed, that he might not in Paradise be, through inequality of merit, parted asunder from his friend, Herbert was first severely tried by the discipline of a long and painful illness. They are said to have breathed their last in the self-same hour. The interval is thus described by Wordsworth:

And when with eye upraised  
To heaven, he knelt before the crucifix  
While o'er the lake the cataract of Lodore  
Pealed to his orisons, and when he passed  
Along the beach of this small isle and thought  
Of his companion, he would pray that both  
(Now that their earthly duties were fulfilled)  
Might die in the same moment.

Cuthbert determined to spend his closing days in devotional retirement on his beloved Farne; but not before he had, in a thorough final visitation of every part of his diocese, confirmed the faith of the scattered flock. He also accepted Alfred's invitation to visit her at one of the daughter houses of Whitby, in the Durham village now called Easington, and there to dedicate a new church. When they sat down to dine he looked very weary and his thoughts seemed to be far away from the goodly fare spread before him. Suddenly his ruddy face grew pale and his knife fell from his hand to the board. His chaplain whispered to the abbess to ask him what vision he had seen. In answer to her question he playfully asked:

' Could I go on eating all day ? '

But, closely pressed, he admitted that he had seen the soul of one of her people borne heavenward and, in answer to her further inquiry, added that she would herself tell him the man's name while he was saying mass on the following morning. The messenger she sent post haste to Whitby at first found all safe and well; but on the morrow, as he was starting to return, met the funeral procession of a brother who had, at the very moment when Cuthbert dropped his knife, been killed by falling from a tree. As soon as Alfred heard the news she hastened to the church, which her guest was then dedicating, and begged him to remember in his mass her departed Hadwald.

On his way thence homeward he was hospitably entertained by the abbess Verc in her convent near the mouth of the Tyne, probably at South Shields. After they had risen from the customary midday siesta he felt thirsty but declined the offer of wine or beer and accepted a cup of spring water. After blessing it and drinking he gave the cup to his chaplain. By him it was handed back to the convent priest who had brought it.

' May I,' said he, ' drink after the bishop ? '

' Yes, why not ? '

He drank, tasted the flavour of wine and, in order to confirm his impression, passed the cup on to a bystander. They looked in wonder each at the other and, later in the day, when they were free to talk, agreed that they had never tasted better wine. Years afterwards one of them spent some time in the monastery of Wearmouth and told Beda the tale.

At Christmastide, 686, Cuthbert laid down his heavy burden and began, on his lonely islet, to burn away with heartsearching fire, the thorns of worldly care. As he set sail from Lindisfarne, a crowd of brethren stood by. One of them, named Walstod, old and venerable, strong in faith but weakened in body by dysentery, asked him when they might hope for his return, and received the answer:

‘When ye bring back hither my dead body.’

More often than of yore he left his own cell to welcome visiting brethren. On one occasion, in bidding them farewell, he invited them to boil and eat a goose which, having been salted and dried, was hanging on the wall of the guest-house. After his departure they ate their fill from the abundant store of provisions they had brought with them but left the goose untouched. When they tried to set sail a sudden storm beat them back and kept them prisoners on the islet for a whole week. They comforted one another as well as they could by recalling their father’s exhortations to patience. On the seventh day he came down to console them. Then, catching sight of the uneaten bird, he gently reproved their disobedience.

‘Hangeth not the goose there, still waiting to be eaten? No wonder the sea did not let you depart! If ye want to go home, put it quickly into the cauldron, cook and eat it!’

They obeyed; the storm ceased. As a following breeze wafted them gently homeward, their feelings were divided between shame and joy; shame for their own disobedience and for the dullness which blinded them to it, even while

they were being scourged by the Creator; joy that God used the forces of Nature to punish disrespect for his loyal servant; joy also that they had themselves been found worthy to be thus signally admonished. One of them, a priest named Cynemund, was still alive when his account of the event was written by Beda.

The two most rigorous months of winter were spent by the lonely bishop in practising the austerities he loved so well. Then, on Wednesday, February 27, he was seized with sudden illness and tended by Herefrith, abbot of Lindisfarne, whose narrative runs as follows:

‘I visited him on the first morning after his illness began, but had arrived at the island with some brethren three days earlier. Hoping to receive as usual his cheering counsel and blessing, I gave the usual signal of my presence. He came to the window and answered my greeting with a groan. What aileth thee, my lord bishop? quoth I; wert thou troubled last night with a touch of thy weakness? Yes, quoth he, I had a touch of weakness last night. It did not occur to me that he meant aught else than his chronic disease, which had been wont to vex him almost daily. So, without asking more, Give us thy blessing, quoth I, the time is at hand for us to put to sea and return home.’

‘Do so, quoth he, embark and return safe home. When God taketh my soul bury me here eastward by the holy cross which I have set up on the south side of my oratory. Under the turf on the north side is a stone cist, given me of yore by the venerable abbot Cudda. Therein place my body, wrapping it in the fine silken robe ye will find there. I would not wear it in my lifetime, but as it was sent me by my dear friend Verc, whom God loveth, I have kept it for my corpse.’

‘To these words I replied, I beseech thee, father, since thy weakness causeth thee to talk of dying, to let some of the brethren stay here to look after thee. Go ye home now, quoth he, and return at a convenient time. Being unable, notwithstanding my urgency, to prevail, I asked how soon

we ought to return. When God willeth, quoth he, and himself directeth you. We obeyed; when all the brethren had assembled in the church I told them of the hint he had let fall about the nearness of his end, and ordered prayer to be offered for him without ceasing. On account of his weakness I felt anxious about our return thither; but for five days a storm hindered us. This, as the event showed, was God's doing, who wished thoroughly to purge his servant from the slightest taint of earthly frailty, and to show the bishop's spiritual foes how powerless they were against such robust faith. At length it grew calm enough for us to cross. We found that he had left his cell and was sitting in the guest-house. Some pressing need caused my companions again to take ship; but I stayed and bestirred myself in the service of our holy father. After warming some water I washed his ulcerous foot, which was freely discharging. I also warmed some wine and begged him to taste it; for his ghastly look showed me that he was famished with hunger as well as tired out.

'When I had finished tending him he lay back quietly on his couch, with me by his side. After waiting in vain for him to speak, I ventured to say, I see, my lord bishop, that since we left thee, thou hast been much distressed by illness; it seems strange that thou wouldest not let some of us stay behind to take care of thee. Nay, quoth he, for my own good, as God foresaw, He willed me to have rather a bad time with none at hand to help me. After your departure my weariness at once began to increase, so I left my cell and came hither, in order that, if any of you came to take care of me, they might find me here and have no need to go farther. Since I entered and settled my limbs on this couch, I have not stirred, but have lain still here five days and nights.

'And how, quoth I, my lord bishop, couldest thou thus keep alive, without tasting food? Then he turned up the coverlet on which he lay, showed me five onions hidden beneath it, and said, These have been my food. As often as my mouth became parched with thirst, a taste of them cooled and refreshed me. (One of the onions seemed to be less than half gnawed.) Never, moreover, during the whole

time since I began to dwell on this island, have my adversaries plagued me so much as in these last five days.

‘I shrank from asking him what he meant and only begged him to let some of us wait on him. He assented. Chief among the few he chose was Beda the priest, who had always been an active member of the bishop’s household and was therefore fully aware of what his master had received and bestowed. His especial duty at this time was to remind the bishop of all he owed, so that he might not pass away without rendering to every man his due.’

The abbot then returned home, and reported to the brethren their father’s order about his burial. It seemed to them all so much fitter for him to be properly honoured by burial in their church that a deputation, headed by the abbot, went to beg of him this concession. Thus were they answered:

‘My own wish was to let my body stay here, where I have fought my poor fight for the Lord, where I long to finish my course, and whence I hope to be raised in righteousness by our loving Judge. But for your sake also I think it ought to stay here, on account of the motley throng of runaways and evildoers who might seek sanctuary near it; because, however unworthy I be, men count me a true member of Christ. The presence of my body among you might therefore entangle you in much troublesome pleading with kings and statesmen on behalf of such refugees.’

To their renewed entreaties and assurances that such trouble would be a labour of love, he yielded on condition that he might be entombed in the inmost recess of the church whither none could penetrate without permission.

At last, on Tuesday, March 19, being too feeble to walk, he was carried, at his own request, by Herefrith and others up to his own cell. When they asked permission for one of their number to enter with him the precinct which had, for many years, been closed against them all, he chose

Walstod, who soon afterwards felt, with joyful amazement, that his dysentery had been cured by touching the holy bishop. Six hours later, about three in the afternoon, Herefrith was summoned by Cuthbert and found him lying before the altar in his oratory. The abbot's narrative thus proceeds:

‘ I sat down beside him; his words were few, for his pain was so intense that he could hardly speak. But when I ventured to ask for his farewell charge to the brethren, he began to say a few forcible words about peace and humility, and about giving a wide berth to such as prefer contention to contentment.

‘ When ye needs must form a decision, said he, about your own affairs, be very careful not to disagree. With other members of Christ's household keep mutual concord; despise not any of your guests, for they are your kinsfolk in faith; make them feel thoroughly at home and speed them on their way, by no means deeming yourselves better than your fellow heirs of the same faith and life. Have no dealings with any who go astray from catholic unity, either by not keeping Easter at the proper time or by contrary and crooked habits. If ye are ever compelled to choose, ye will please me better by digging my bones out of my tomb, carrying them away with you and abiding wherever God will, than by making any kind of compromise with wrong doers or bowing your necks beneath the yoke of schismatics. Strive your utmost to learn and keep the catholic decrees of the holy Fathers. Be very careful also to keep those rules of monastic life which it hath pleased God to give you through my ministry. For, though in my lifetime some have despised me, well wot I that after my death ye will see more clearly than now what hath been my character and how worthy of respect is my teaching.’

‘ In consequence of his extreme weakness his utterance of these words was broken and fitful. For the remainder of the day he enjoyed tranquil hope of coming bliss. Through the night he watched and prayed, till the usual hour of nocturns. Then, having received from me the



healthful sacraments of penance and extreme unction, he fortified himself by partaking of the Lord's Body and Blood. With eyes upturned heavenward and uplifted hands, he then sent forth, in quest of the joys of the kingdom of heaven, a soul fully attuned to lofty strains of praise. I at once went out and reported his death to the brethren, who had themselves also been passing the night in watchful prayer and were at that moment chanting Psalm lx, which begins:

O God, thou hast cast us off  
and broken us down:  
Thou hast been angry;  
O restore us again.

'Without delay one of them ran, lit two torches and climbed a lofty eminence, in order to give the agreed signal to the brethren in Lindisfarne. When the brother who had been watching for it saw the signal, he ran quickly to the church, where the assembled brethren were at that moment chanting the same psalm.'

That psalm is the first appointed for Wednesday mattins in the Benedictine breviary. The day was Wednesday, March 20, 687. After Cuthbert's body had been washed it was wrapped in the silken robe given him by Verc, which had first been smeared with fragrant antiseptic ointment. His head was enveloped with a kerchief, and on his breast was laid an oblation of bread and wine. In accordance with ancient custom, his feet were bound with 'hell-shoon,' for his walk not, as of yore, to Valhalla, but to meet his Lord.

No sooner had the cist and its precious burden been reverently entombed, at the north end of the altar in St Peter's church, than the trouble presaged by the psalm broke out among the family of brethren. It was probably caused by the temporary rule of Wilfrith, who may well have ridden roughshod over their feelings and prejudices. Many departed rather than bear the brunt of the storm. The restoration of peace and reunion of the family were

due to Eadberht, one of themselves, who was consecrated about a year later Bishop of Lindisfarne and, as Beda puts it, bound up the brokenhearted. He is described as a man of great spiritual power, remarkably learned in the Scriptures, exceedingly diligent in almsgiving. Every year he bestowed on the poor a tithe, not only of cattle but of crops, fruit and even clothing. By his order Finan's log church was roofed with lead.

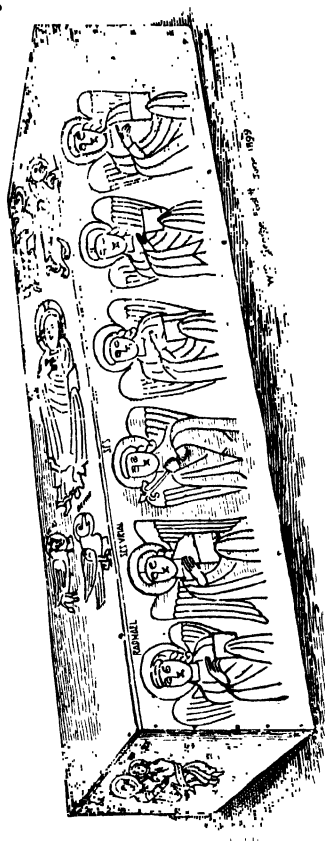
Eleven years later the brethren wished to have Cuthbert's relics above ground, in order to honour them more worthily. Eadberht gave leave to open the grave and raise the cist, but bade them await his dies natalis. In that year, 698, March 20 was the Wednesday after the fourth Sunday in Lent, and Eadberht himself was, in accordance with his Lenten custom, living alone on St Cuthbert's Isle, the corner of Lindisfarne hallowed by his predecessor. The brethren expected to find within merely bones and dry dust but were amazed when they saw the body quite sound and its wrappings quite fresh. Amazement gave way to terror; in haste they sent word to the bishop, together with a piece of the wrapping. After he had reverently kissed it, he bade them wrap the body in a new linen shroud, given by abbess Alflred, and place it in the oaken coffin they had not only made but skilfully ornamented with carvings. On the outer lid is a figure of Christ, standing barefoot and holding in his left hand under his robe a book of the gospels. Above, to left and right, are a winged man and lion, signifying St Matthew and St Mark; below, the bull of St Luke and the eagle of St John. On the right hand side of the coffin were carved six archangels; on the left, in a double row, the twelve apostles, together with St Paul and St Barnabas. On the longer end were Michael and Gabriel; on the smaller the Virgin and Child. Some of the names are cut in Roman, others in runic characters.

Eadberht foretold that the opened grave would not long remain empty. Soon afterwards he fell ill; on May 6 he

passed through the gate of death and was there entombed. On the pavement above remained the relics of Cuthbert, the new coffin being enclosed within the cist.

Farne continued to be the home of a single anchoret. First after Cuthbert came a monk of Ripon named Oidilwald who dwelt there till his death on March 28, 699. He found the oratory out of repair, stopped up the chinks and nailed up a calf-hide in the corner where, like Cuthbert, he was wont to pray. Felgeld, who came next, rebuilt the oratory, cut up the calf-hide and distributed the pieces as relics. Their efficacy he proved by washing sores on his face with water, in which he had placed a piece. The sores disappeared; but he knew not whether his thanks were due to Cuthbert or to Oidilwald. The most famous Farne anchoret is Bartholomew, who displaced Elwyn in the year 1150 and entered into his well-earned rest on the festival of St John the Baptist, June 24, 1193. On the night of September 5, 1838, the Fern group of islets was hallowed afresh by the splendid heroism of Grace Darling, who dwelt in the lighthouse on Longstone.

On June 7, 793, while Higbald was bishop of Lindisfarne, a party of Danes pillaged the church and treated with brutal cruelty the few monks that fell into their hands; but they left untouched Cuthbert's shrine. In the year 875 Eardulf, the sixteenth and last bishop of Lindisfarne, together with abbot Eadred and a party of monks, fled before a fiercer invasion, taking on a wheeled bier in one coffin the skeleton of their revered patron, the head of Oswald and the few bones of Aidan which Colman had left behind him. Like sheep hunted by wolves they picked their way, strong in faith and hope, from one hiding-place to another, among the hills of Northumbria. Everywhere they found a hearty welcome among men who inherited from their forefathers deep reverence for Cuthbert's memory. At Brigham, Bridekirk, Plumbland, Aspatria, Crosscanonby and other central stations of the earliest Christian missions,



ST. CUTHBERT'S OAKEN COFFIN



their hosts had many ancient tales to tell them of Ninian and Kentigern.

An attempt of the seniors to cross with their precious burden to Ireland, leaving the juniors behind, was frustrated by a storm. At last, early in 883, by favour of the Danish boy king Guthred, whom Eardulf had ransomed from slavery, they found a safe resting place in Chester-le-Street. Thence in 995, through fear of the Danes, the coffin was removed by bishop Ealdhun, first to Ripon, then to the summit of the hill on which Durham cathedral now stands, a splendid memorial of the saint who is there enshrined. The hillside was then covered with trees and brushwood, the growth of untold centuries. Two temporary churches were hastily set up, the first of wattled boughs, the second of timber. Four years later, on September 4, 999, the relics were reverently laid in a dignified stone church which had been built in the interval, under the superintendence of the bishop and earl Uhtred, by the whole population between the Tees and the Coquet. Ealdhun then became first bishop of Durham.

In the year 1093 that church was demolished and the present stately pile was begun by bishop William of St Carileph. During the demolition and building the relics were kept in the cloister garth, within a beautiful stone tomb covered with a marble slab. Thence, on August 29, 1104, they were reverently and enthusiastically transferred to a shrine in the new cathedral. From the coffin was taken Cuthbert's own copy of St John's Gospel, which is now preserved at Stonyhurst, in the college dedicated to that apostle.

On May 17, 1827, the relics of Cuthbert were exhumed, taken out of the decayed coffin which had held them since the year 698, placed in a new one and re-buried in a stone grave beneath the floor of the shrine. From the crown of the skull to the ankle bones the skeleton measured 5 feet 8 inches. Between the decayed linen shroud and the

skeleton were found fragments of at least five silken robes. They had been expressly made while the corpse was awaiting its translation and were marvels of cunning and costly craftsmanship. In the coffin were found also an altar slab coeval with Cuthbert, of oak overlaid with silver; a discoloured burse, or small linen bag for holding the sacred elements; a stole of brilliant golden thread, broken into five pieces but otherwise perfect, embellished with figures of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos, Obadiah, Hosea, Joel, Habakkuk, Jonah, Zechariah, Nahum, John the Evangelist and Thomas the Apostle; a maniple embellished on one side with figures of pope Gregory the Great, his deacon Peter and John the Baptist, on the other with figures of three martyrs, namely pope Sixtus, whom the emperor Decius put to death, his deacon Laurentius and the apostle James. Between the two sets of three figures are the words DEXTERA DEI. Inscriptions on both stole and maniple state that Elflaed, Alfred's queen, ordered them to be made for Frithestan, who was, in the year 905, consecrated bishop of Winchester. In 934, two years after Frithestan's death, king Athelstan travelled northward in order to compel Constantine king of Scotland to abide by a treaty he had broken. According to tradition, on the eve of the battle of Ethandun, in May, 878, king Alfred had been cheered by a vision of Cuthbert, promising him the decisive victory he won over the Danes. Alfred's grandson therefore felt in duty bound to visit on his way the shrine of St Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street, and bestowed on its guardians not only the stole and maniple here described but a golden girdle and two golden bracelets also found in the coffin, together with numerous other costly gifts. His piety was rewarded by a signal victory over his foes.

Deeply buried among the robes was found a golden cross, doubtless Cuthbert's own, weighing 15 dwt. 12 grs., with a large garnet at the centre, a medium-sized one in each angle and twelve small ones on each branch.

Among the treasures of the British Museum is a magnificent copy of the Gospels, which fell into the sea when the abortive attempt was made to cross with his relics to Ireland. After the disconsolate losers had been driven back to the northern coast of Solway Firth, they long searched in vain for the precious volume, but at last, guided by a vision, found it high and dry on the sands near Whithorn. The indelible stains of salt water on its pages are an enduring memorial of that adventure. On the last page stands the record:

‘Eadfrith bishop of the church of Lindisfarne this book wrote at first, for God and St Cuthbert, and all the saints that are in the island. And Ethelwald, bishop of Lindisfarne, put it together and enriched it as well as he could. And Billfrith the anchoret wrought in smith’s work the ornaments that are on the cover, adorned it with gold and gems and overlaid it with unalloyed silver.’

The author of this record, Aldred, ‘a worthless and most wretched priest,’ wrote between the lines of the Latin text, about the middle of the tenth century, an English translation in the Northumbrian dialect. The text itself was copied, soon after Cuthbert’s death, in fine and bold Scotie semi-uncials, from a manuscript of the Vulgate which abbot Hadrian had brought with him from Naples.



## CHAPTER XXXII

### WILFRITH, APOSTLE OF SUSSEX

As it is observed of nightingales 'that they sing the sweetest when farthest from their nests, so this Wilfrith was most diligent in God's service when at the greatest distance from his own home.

Thomas Fuller, Church History of Britain.

**H**AVING collected in Deira a band of old comrades, Wilfrith made his way into Mercia and was met by a wealthy ealdorman named Berhtwald, whose father had been a brother, probably Peada, of the reigning king Ethelred. That grandson of Penda begged the travellers to settle near him and gave them land for their monastic home. No sooner however had Wilfrith begun to enjoy there peace and quietness, than he was hustled away by order of the king, whose wife Osthryth was probably a partisan of her brother king Ecgrith. Both moreover would naturally shrink from provoking another war with so powerful a neighbour. Leaving his monks behind, but taking with him a few priests and servants, the hunted exile sought refuge with Centwine, who was then ruling part at least of Wessex; but his wife, a sister of Eormenburh, made herself an agent of that queen's hatred and would not let her lord harbour its victim. He therefore passed on into isolated and penurious Sussex. There he found in Athelwath a staunch friend who solemnly promised to be unmoved by threats or bribes. That king had become a Christian under the influence of Wulfhere, who led him up out of the font and bestowed on him, in token of that adoption, two slices of West Saxon territory, namely, the Isle of Wight and the part of Hampshire now called East and West Meon. His wife Eaba was the daughter of

a Christian sub-king named Eanfrith and had, before her marriage, been baptized among her own folk, the Hwiccas of Gloucestershire. Besides the king and queen there were, on Wilfrith's arrival, no Christians in Sussex but some half dozen Scotie monks headed by Dicul, whose humble abode at Bosham, three and a half miles W.S.W. of Chichester, was girt round with sea and forest. Neither their example nor their preaching had made the slightest impression on the savage wreckers for whose sake they had left their dear homeland. Perhaps, like the three Scots whom, in the year 891, Alfred welcomed to Wessex, they had spread sail in rudderless and oarless curachs, pilgrims they cared not whither, and putting their whole trust in Him who maketh the clouds his chariots and walketh upon the wings of the wind.

Sussex had long been cut off from its neighbours by Romney Marsh on the east, and the almost impenetrable Andredsweald on the north and west. Right nobly did Wilfrith take advantage of the opportunity so strangely provided. Cruelty of wind and wave had, fifteen years ago, cast him on the coast of that stubborn folk; to their cruelty his life had then been well-nigh forfeit. Now it was the cruelty of his persecutors that had placed him in their midst, at a time when the cruelty of a long drought had sunk them to the lowest depth of misery. For three years, so Beda avers, no drop of rain had fallen on their land. When the pangs of hunger became unbearable, the starving wretches, in parties of forty or fifty, used to rush into the presence, as they believed, of Woden, by joining hands and flinging themselves headlong over the edge of a steep cliff, in order either to drown in the surging sea or be crushed to death on the sharp shingle. It was a chastened and sobered Wilfrith who preached boundless faith, hope and love to such despairing folk. Month after month he unfolded, in simple and clear but impassioned language, the divine scheme of salvation from the Creation to the Day

of Doom. To the intense joy of king and queen, ealdormen and thanes soon yielded to the spell of his convincing eloquence, and humbler folk were either quick to follow their example or yielded to the pressure of Athelwath. In baptizing the deposed bishop was aided by four priests named Eappa, Padda, Burghelm and Oiddi.

On the day of the great general baptism material blessings were added to spiritual and seemed to be the direct gift of the true God whose love they had been learning. Rain fell, gentle but abundant; from the parched soil crops began to sprout; the bare meads clad themselves with verdure; the year again began to run its joyous and fruitful course. With right good will, therefore, on that Easter Eve did the assembled thousands renounce their superstitions and signify by actual spitting their abhorrence of idols, while their heart and flesh rejoiced in the living God.

Wilfrith's expert eye, trained probably in Friesland, enabled him to confer on his new flock another boon. Though the sea and rivers were full of fish, they had hitherto caught nothing but eels, hindered perhaps by a superstitious prejudice against other kinds. He bade his attendants collect eel nets wherever they could and cast them into the sea. Their obedience was soon rewarded by a haul of 300 fish, various in kind. One hundred they kept, another they gave to the owners of the nets and the remainder to the poor. Thus did Wilfrith win all hearts and make his hearers more and more hopeful that the spiritual blessings he promised were no less real than the material boons he had conferred.

Selsey or Seal Island was then a large domain of eighty-seven hides, joined to the mainland by a strip so narrow that a stone could be flung across it. That Lindisfarne of Sussex, as it may well be called, was bestowed by Ethelwath on Wilfrith, as a home for himself and his fellow exiles. There he built a monastery, the headquarters of his

new episcopal work, and appointed Eappa first abbot. Among the inhabitants of Selsey who thus became his subjects were 250 male and female slaves, from whose 'necks, after he had by baptism rescued them from bondage to Satan, he also, by giving them their freedom, loosened the yoke of bondage to man.'

Among the outlaws who were then sharing with hog, hound and boar the dense forests that skirted Sussex, was Caedualla, an exceedingly vigorous scion of the stock of Cerdic. His father Kenbert was a great-grandson of the second Bretwalda, Ceawlin. His name betokens Welsh ancestry on his 'mother's side. Wilfrith bestowed on that younger exile fatherly affection and helped him in his preparations to win the kingship of Wessex that was his by right, but failed, if indeed he tried, to curb his wild and impetuous spirit. His career of conquest seems to have begun in Sussex soon after the hallowing of Selsey; for, by an extant charter, dated August 3, 683, he granted his new friend lands near Chichester for the building of the monastery there. Most of those lands were long ago submerged by encroachment of the sea. If in the autumn of 684 they caught sight of Halley's comet, it probably made them feel confident of the impending fall of their several foes. At the head of his band of Adullamites, which included all the boldest young warriors of Wessex, Caedualla slew Athelwath and cruelly ravaged Sussex, until he was driven off by two ealdormen, Bercthun and Andhun, who proceeded to rule as joint kings.

Early in the year 686 Caedualla became by conquest sole king of Wessex, summoned Wilfrith to his court and appointed him his chief counsellor. He then invaded and conquered Sussex in a campaign which proved fatal to Bercthun. In a second campaign of that year he and his brother, whose nickname Mul means half-breed, raided Kent and slew king Edric. Wilfrith was still in Wessex when the Isle of Wight, as yet entirely heathen, fell an easy

prey to Caedwalla, who exterminated the Jute islanders and replaced them by West Saxons. In fulfilment of a vow that, though himself still unregenerate, he would give to the Lord one quarter of the land and the spoil, he bestowed that portion on Wilfrith, who entrusted the 300 hides to one of his clergy named Bernwin, a son of his own sister. A priest named Hiddila was appointed to help that nephew by preaching and baptizing. The Christian first-fruits of the island were soon reaped but not by them. Two boy princes, brothers of the sub-king Arwald, had escaped the general massacre by fleeing to the mainland. At Stoneham on the Itchin they found, as they believed, a safe hiding place, but were betrayed. Close by, at Redford or Redbridge, in his own monastery, dwelt a West Saxon priest abbot named Cynibert. When he heard of the order for the slaying of these helpless lads, he boldly went to the king, who had secluded himself not far away for the healing of his wounds, and obtained leave first to instruct them in the Christian faith and cleanse them in the laver of life. Having himself done so, he had the satisfaction of seeing them gladly face the executioner who opened before them the gate of heaven. The day of their death was August 21, 686. The anniversary was long kept in memory of their martyrdom.

In the year 687 Mul again raided Kent, more fiercely than before, and was bitterly cursed by the monks he rendered homeless. Yet, like the Black Prince of a later age, he was peerless in courtesy and generosity. A house took fire in which he and twelve of his followers were dwelling and was so closely beset by the armed kindlers thereof that all thirteen perished in the flames. Caedwalla avenged him by a third raid and then brought his own meteoric career to an explosive end. Sated with bloodshed and conquest, perhaps also overwhelmed with grief at the loss of his dear brother, he abandoned his realm and started for Rome. At Samer in the Pas-de-Calais is the site of the church built by St Kelmar, with the money he

received from the pilgrim. In Lombardy Caedualla was hospitably entertained by king Cunibert, whose wife was English and his father Wilfrith's friend Berctar. The ancient Lenten Scrutiny had then, perhaps, fallen into disuse, but for so important a convert a special course of instruction was doubtless provided. On Easter Eve, April 10, 689, he was baptized in the Lateran basilica and named Peter by pope Sergius I, who also, as his godfather, led him up out of the piscina. Ten days later was gratified the royal neophyte's earnest desire to die soon after his baptism. The sudden change from active outdoor life on down and moor to monastic seclusion within walls, and from full fleshy diet to the rigorous Lenten fast, probably rendered the impulsive pilgrim defenceless against the miasmic air of the Eternal City. He was entombed in St Peter's and his epitaph, a dozen couplets of highly flattering eulogy, was written by Benedictus Crispus, archbishop of Milan. More shrewd is the pithy comment of Thomas Fuller:

‘ While he pretended to go out of the world, a world of spiritual pride and superstition went into him, if (as is too too suspicious) he had a high opinion to merit heaven thereby.’

Wilfrith's apostolic work in Sussex did not make him forgetful of his rejected claim. From pope Benedict II, who succeeded Agatho in June 684, and also, at least four years later, from the godfather of Caedualla, he obtained confirmation of Agatho's futile decree in his favour.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

## ALDHELM, ABBOT OF MALMESBURY.

And the Lord's bondservant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves. 2 Tim. ii, 24, 25.

In the Benedictine abbey which has grasped the idea of its lawgiver, there will be order and rule, for no family can exist without them: but the yoke will be sweet and the burden light. E. L. Taunton, *The English Black Monks of St Benedict*, I, 33.

**I**N a charter dated August 26, 675, the style of which clearly points to Aldhelm as its author, bishop Lothair, the nephew of Agilbert, conferred on him the abbacy of Malmesbury, 'where from the first bloom of childhood and his earliest efforts to spell, he had a thorough literary training and was nursed in the bosom of holy Mother Church.' The vacancy was doubtless due to the death of Maelduib. The new abbot had already been ordained priest by the same bishop, probably in the interval between his first and second periods of study under Hadrian, whom, in the letter already mentioned, he calls 'the venerable preceptor of my awkward childhood (*rudis infantiae*).' Aldhelm is so fond of hyperbolical antithesis that no inference about his age can be safely drawn from this expression; but fitness for priesthood was then rare, priests were sorely needed and his ability was so exceptional that his age at ordination may well have been, like Wilfrith's and Ceolfrith's, considerably less than thirty, the canonical age. Alfred was only twenty-six years old when she succeeded Hild as abbess of Whitby.

On the death of Lothair the Frank, in the following year, a Wessex man named Haddi was consecrated by Theodore

at London third bishop of Winchester. He was one of the two abbots who subscribed that charter. The shrinkage of Wessex seems to have made the division of the diocese less urgent than elsewhere, and the strife between rival kinglets probably made it both inexpedient and impracticable. According to Bede, Haddi was more eminent in spiritual power than in booklearning. From one of Aldhelm's letters to him it appears that his patronage was abundantly bestowed on the abbey of Malmesbury.

By an extant charter, dated July 6, 680, lands were granted by Haddi to Hemgils, the first Saxon abbot of Glastonbury, as the Isle of Avalon was then beginning to be called by the advancing invaders. The inclusion of that ancient monastery within the borders of Wessex must have deeply gratified Aldhelm and widened the range of his influence. An account of its ancient traditions, as they were doubtless then poured into his eagerly listening ears, would have been a priceless gift to posterity.

No king of Wessex is named among those who ordered Theodore to summon the important council which met on September 17 in the same year at Hatfield. We may fairly infer that, though Centwine took the name, he lacked the power of a king.

So poorly hitherto had Malmesbury abbey been endowed with land that the small brotherhood could hardly grow enough to eat; and the basilica, built of logs and thatched with reeds, was becoming overcrowded. Aldhelm began his thirty years of administration by building a more stately church in honour of the Saviour and the chief apostles, Peter and Paul. An appeal to them for help and protection, filling nineteen hexameters, was written by Aldhelm and chanted at the dedication.

The abbot's energy and the bishop's favour soon launched the monastery on its prosperous course. The rule of life was doubtless, like Hadrian's, Benedictine. By every road men and boys sped thither, some in quest of holiness, others



eager to learn. Though his erudition was manifold, Aldhelm's charm lay rather in his readiness to chat with all comers and in the cheerful simplicity of his truly religious life. However keenly carping critics might sometimes smart under the sting of his apt and prompt repartee, genuine learners were always gladdened and refreshed by the flowing nectar of his oral teaching, in which he freely used ingenious riddles. Of the hundred preserved in his *Book of Enigmas* the following is a fair specimen:

Twin sisters we, a common lot is ours;  
 To our united labour all owe food;  
 Joint is our toil, but separate our tasks;  
 One of us runs, the other never stirs,  
 Yet neither to her sister bears a grudge.  
 Our food we chew but never swallow down;  
 Its shattered fragments both of us reject.

Thus might Rudyard Kipling have endowed with speech the upper and nether millstones. Such descriptions tended of course to sharpen both eyes and wits. With one exception, their length varies from four to sixteen lines; that one, *De Creatura*, eighty-three lines long, is an eloquent summary of the marvellous contrasts in which the Artificer of the Universe seems to delight. Among the living creatures pithily described in the shorter riddles are the peacock, the nightingale, the bee, the lion, the eagle, the elephant, the leech, the locust and the weasel.

Equal in quality to Aldhelm's are the forty hexameter riddles of Tatwin or Tautun, a monk of Breodone in Worcestershire, who succeeded Brihtwald as archbishop of Canterbury. The initial and final letters of their first lines form an acrostic of the same hexameter. A supplementary collection of sixty is also extant, written by Hwatberht Eusebius, the successor of Ceolfrith in the abbacy of Wearmouth and Jarrow. Aldhelm's collection is embedded in an elaborate dissertation on metres, addressed to king Aldfrith, of Northumbria, whom he names Acircius. He quotes not

only from Vergil, Ovid and other ancient classics, but from an astonishing number of Christian poets.

As Malmesbury lay in the disputable marchland between Wessex and Mercia, the rulers and nobles of both kingdoms vied with one another in endowing, for the weal of their own souls as well as for the maintenance of the monks, such a glowing centre of lofty aspiration. Among the earliest of these donors was a Mercian thane. The exuberant imagery of the charter composed by Aldhelm is so characteristic of him that it may fitly be translated here:

Fortune, the wanton queen of a deceitful world, emits no milk-white sheen of never-fading lilies to make her lovable, but has so steeped herself in bitter gall and is so lamentably defiled that all must hate her. In this vale of tears she grips her sons with sharp teeth and rends them limb from limb with poisonous, gaping jaws of stinking flesh. Though by smirking and smiling she seems to her luckless victims quite fascinating, yet, unless the son of the Lofty Helper comes to the rescue, her shameless way slopes downwards to the bottom of the foul stream that howls through Hell. Since therefore her toboggan plunges headlong to the final crash, we ought to hasten with utmost speed towards the lovely meadows of unspeakable gladness; where the ears of the happy never cease to quaff deep draughts of such swelling and joyous hymnody as is poured forth by angelic choirs; and where into good and blessed nostrils is wafted such flooding fragrance as no words can describe. Captivated by my desire of such happiness, I, Kenfrith, have, in this year of grace 680, with the consent of my lord king Ethelred, bestowed in perpetuity on the venerable Aldhelm, for the service of God and St Peter, a certain parcel of land, enough to maintain ten cottagers, in the place called Wootton.

In the following year king Ethelred endowed the monastery with two farms, one at Newnton in Wilts, the other at Tetbury in Gloucestershire. His grant describes Kenfrith as "my patrician and kinsman." By a charter executed in

a witenagemot held at Burford on July 30, 685, Aldhelm received from the Mercian sub-king, Berhtwald, son of Wulfhere, nephew of Ethelred and patron of banished Wilfrith, a gift of land at Sumerford in Wilts, four times as much as Kenfrith had given him. Among the witan who signed this charter were archbishop Theodore, bishops Saxulf of Lichfield and Bosel of Worcester, all, doubtless, good friends of Aldhelm, but, as appears from the following simple and dignified preamble, saner and more sober than he in their style:

Though a verbal declaration might be enough to publish the endowments which fear and love of the Lord leads men to devote to pious uses, yet, as times change and the future is doubtful, they ought to be confirmed in due form by written documents of state. Wherefore I, Berhtwald, have, for the healing of my soul and the forgiveness of my past sins, etc., etc.

The position of those lands bears witness to the encroachment of Mercia on Wessex since the death, in 672, of Cenwealh. For a year his widow Sexburh ably held the reins of power, in defiance of Saxon custom, which allowed no queenly authority to the wife of a king. Over the other claimants who weakened the realm by their strife Centwine so far prevailed that he enjoyed the title of king from 676 till 685. A letter written to Aldhelm by one of his pupils, named Athelwald, begins by reminding him that, during the last summer they spent together, their wretched fatherland had been wofully devastated by widespread warfare. The letter also shows that Aldhelm's florid style was then admired and imitated. Much simpler is the style of a letter written by a nameless Scot, who begs the abbot to receive him as a pupil. 'Thou,' he says, 'wert fostered by a holy man of my race.'

In the year 682 the Dorn Welsh began to resist the stealthy advance of their neighbours, but were prevented by Centwine, who, says the Chronicler, drove their defeated

host as far as the English Channel. So heartbreaking was the slaughter that they meekly submitted and became tributary. Thus was Dorset added to Wessex. Winfrith of Crediton, the future apostle of Germany and first archbishop of Mainz, was then about two years old and afterwards went to school in a monastery near Exeter. The style of his extant letters proves that Aldhelm was, if not his teacher, at least his literary model.

In Exeter itself, for the next three centuries, victors and vanquished dwelt apart, the former in the southern half of the city, the latter in the northern, where stood churches dedicated to St Petroc and St Piran or Kieran.

Four years later Centwine gave way before the impetuous onset of Caedwalla and became a monk. On August 19, 688, a few days before his dramatic pilgrimage, that restorer of the line of Ceawlin bestowed on the abbot of Malmesbury estates of land in Charlton, Credwell, Kemble and Burton. Finding such of them as lay eastward of Bradon forest inconveniently distant, Aldhelm conveyed them, before the end of that month, to a 'patrician' named Baldred in exchange for other land near the Avon and a right to fish in that river. Both the charter of bestowal and the charter of exchange were signed by the aged Centwine as king *de facto*. Ini was elected to fill the vacancy, played the part of Numa Pompilius and lived in perfect harmony with Aldhelm. The new king's natural gifts of prudence, piety and valour became more fruitful of good under the abbot's fatherly guidance. Thirteen years later, in consequence probably of the still increasing number of brethren at Malmesbury, Ini and Haddi bestowed on him land near Rudborne in Wilts, enough to maintain forty-five cottagers.

Though Aldhelm is not named in the preamble, he may well have played a leading part in the witenagemot which enacted the famous seventy-nine dooms of king Ini. Two bishops are named, Haddi and Erkenwald, who died April 30, 693. The second doom ordered the baptism of children

within thirty days of birth, the third severely forbade Sunday labour, the fourth insisted on the due payment at Martinmas of 'church-scots.'

When Aldhelm's monastic domain was complete its component parts were so conveniently situated that, on a long summer day, a man might leave the abbey at dawn, make a complete circuit of the farms, enjoy the many fair prospects that opened before him, and re-enter the gates at sunset. Within the walled precinct he built another church in honour of the Blessed Virgin; and close by yet another, in honour of the archangel Michael. So well did the former and larger of these two please the fastidious Normans that they left it standing till the middle of the twelfth century. Before the building of the great Norman church two more had been added, in honour of St Andrew and St Lawrence. But for decay, therefore, the hill of Malmesbury, like the meadow of Clonmacnoise on the Shannon, might have been crowned and sanctified by a group of seven churches.

Near the river From in Somerset Aldhelm built another abbey, dedicating the church to St John the Baptist. At Bradford-on-Avon, halfway between Malmesbury and Glastonbury, he built a third, of which, in William's time, no trace remained but its little church, dedicated to St Lawrence. That venerable monument of a bygone age shows even now but few signs of decay.

Of Aldhelm's ministerial work only one remarkable feature is recorded, but it may be taken as a fair sample of his practical wisdom. It would have fallen into oblivion had not king Alfred, in his lost Handbook, thought it right to protect him against all suspicion of frivolity by giving a good reason for his authorship of a popular street-song. So untrained was then the mind of the average churchgoer and so earthly his aims that, as soon as mass had been sung, he sped away homeward before the sermon, not caring to learn the rudiments of his faith. Disguised, therefore, as a strolling gleeman, that good shepherd used to await his

straying sheep, harp in hand, on the one bridge which then spanned the Avon beneath Malmesbury. When his jocular and sprightly lays had collected a crowd of regular listeners, he began to mingle grave with gay and thus restored health to their souls by teaching them much precious Bible truth.

From Faricius we learn also that, on the days of the cattle fair, Aldhelm used to meet the drovers on their way thither and feed them with such milk of simple doctrine as they could digest. Consequently, leaving the market, they followed him of their own accord into 'the sheepfolds of the saints,' listened reverently to the chanting of mass and at eventide, as they tramped homeward, so enjoyed the fullness of their souls that they forgot the weariness of their bodies.

Among Aldhelm's extant letters is one to the clergy of bishop Wilfrith, bidding them remain steadfastly loyal to him during their compulsory separation, even if they were driven into exile oversea. The writer again manifests his love of bees by urging his 'viscerales contribules' to emulate their orderly submission to their ruler. The occasion was probably the banishment of Wilfrith in the year 681, after his release from imprisonment. On their way from Mercia into Wessex he and his comrades may well have been honoured guests at Malmesbury.

Full of interest is Aldhelm's dedicatory ode, in eighty-five hexameters, *De basilica aedificata a Bugge*. Her father was king Centwine; her mother's name was Dunne. Spectre is a synonym of her own name, which forms part of humbug, a sham spectre, and of bugbear, a spectre disguised as a bear. After briefly describing the careers of Centwine and Caedualla, the poem states that, in the reign of Ini, Bugge built a lofty sacellum wherein stood twelve altars, one dedicated to each apostle, and a thirteenth in the apse, namely the high altar dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Brethren and sisters are urged to make the antiphonal chanting worthy of the great occasion. The date was August 15, the feast of the Assumption. The altar hangings

were woven throughout of gold thread; the golden chalice was adorned with gems; the broad paten was made of silver. Equally sumptuous were the processional cross and the perforated thurible which hung from the roof. The land on which this double monastery was built had been granted to mother and daughter by Ethelred of Mercia and Oshere, sub-king of the Gloucestershire Hwiccas. Through it flows the river Colne about twenty miles north of Malmesbury.

To the same dedication festival may probably be assigned Aldhelm's hexameter poem *De Aris*, consisting of fourteen separate invocations varying in length from ten to thirty-six lines. They are addressed to the Virgin, St Peter, St Paul and the other apostles, ending with Matthias instead of Judas.

When he had completed the organization of his three abbeys, Aldhelm decided, with the willing consent of his two staunch friends, Ethelred and Ini, to visit Rome. The father of a goodly brotherhood, the lord of a princely domain, happy he seemed in the eyes of men. Yet he foreboded that, after his death, under less pious kings, his adolescent communities might soon be in as perilous a plight as the crew of an open boat on a sea infested with sharks. Of the only defensive armour the Pope had secured a lucrative monopoly.

His preparations for the journey were made on an estate of his own in Dorset, near Wareham and Corfe Castle. The promontory known as St Aldhelm's Head commemorates his influence in that district; through ignorant confusion it has also been called St Alban's Head. About two miles from the seashore he built a small church and there, while his comrades were busy preparing for the voyage, used to commit their going and returning to the fatherly care of God. No trace of that church now remains, but in William's time the walls were standing and just enough of the roof was left to shield the altar. The shepherds of the district

always found there, for themselves and their flocks, such good shelter from stormy showers that they firmly believed no drop of rain ever fell within that charmed area.

At Rome, late probably in the last decade of the seventh century, Sergius I, the godfather of Caedwalla Peter, duly honoured his illustrious guest by lodging him in the Lateran palace, which had been the papal residence since Constantine gave it to Silvester. By chanting mass every day Aldhelm kept himself and his fellow pilgrims in the protecting care of God. The chasuble he used in Rome was, in William's time, among the precious relics of him preserved at Malmesbury: a finely woven garment, dyed scarlet and embroidered with peacocks amid black scrolls. Like the bone relics it proved that the saint's stature had been dignified but not over tall. His hair was white, his complexion ruddy, his hands remarkably beautiful.

In the bull granted him by Sergius the enumeration of the ordinary exemptions from episcopal authority is preceded by an eloquent exposition of the whole duty of a brotherhood of monks to God and man; also by an emphatic reminder that wilful neglect of such duty would forfeit all claim to papal patronage.

Besides a stock of relics and a motley collection of such wares as might surprise and please his friends, Aldhelm took home with him, probably from Lombardy, a magnificent altar of gleaming white marble, four feet long, a foot and a half wide and three palms thick. His landing on the shore of Dorset was the signal for a crowded gathering of all classes to manifest their joy. Of his monks some carried in front of the procession a wooden cross, others scented the road with fragrant incense. Between the two kings Aldhelm so divided his gifts that the marble altar fell to Ini, who bestowed it on the church of St Mary in the royal town of Somerset named Bruton.

At Everley in Wilts, on May 26, 704, was held a witenagemot which conferred on all the abbeys of Wessex privi-



leged freedom to serve God and pray for the welfare of the kingdom without being hindered by worldly affairs or liability to taxation. This charter was signed by Ini, Aldhelm, nine other abbots and nine officers of state.

• In the following year, at the request of a synod, Aldhelm wrote to Geraint, king of his neighbours the West Welsh, a letter exhorting him, for the sake of catholic unity, to suppress in his realm the druidic tonsure and the obsolete reckoning of Easter. The sobriety of the style shows that the writer had outgrown his youthful effervescence. This document is the earliest evidence that the difference between the Dionysian computation and the Victorian was understood in Britain. Incidentally he draws a deplorable picture of the venomous hatred cherished by Welsh clergy beyond the Severn against their English brothers in Christ. Not only did they scorn to worship in the same church or eat at the same table, but would throw to dogs and swine the broken victuals of an English meal; would cleanse also of defilement the plates and cups by scouring them with sand or ashes. So far from offering the kiss of brotherhood to catholic clergy who came to sojourn among them, they compelled all such to submit to penitential and purifying quarantine in the literal sense of the word, before admitting them to their own presence. Aldhelm's peroration concludes with the same argument that had prevailed at Whitby, namely an appeal to the text:

‘Rock thou art, and on this rock will I build my Church.’

It was probably respectful affection for the writer of this letter rather than his arguments that caused the Welsh subjects of Ini to obey his bidding; their kindred beyond Severn remained obdurate till the latter half of the eighth century, the Welsh of Cornwall till the tenth.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### JOHN OF BEVERLEY

He maketh the dumb to speak. Mark vii, 37.

He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also. John xiv, 12.

**H**IS birthplace was Harpham in the East Riding of Yorkshire; his parents were of high rank. In his boyhood he had for his teacher archbishop Theodore, who named him John. He was afterwards trained at Whitby under the abbess Hild; but hardly before the beginning of her long illness. His subsequent reputation for learning stood so high that, in two old coloured glass windows filled by his figure, he was represented as the first to take the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Oxford. One of them was a window in the cathedral library at Salisbury, the other a chapel window of University College. However doubtful may be that tradition, he was certainly too full of zeal to hide his lamp under a bushel measure, and became, as soon as he was duly qualified, an active missionary preacher. By himself swerving neither to right nor left in the narrow way he had chosen, he sped straight to the hearts of his hearers the shafts of his eloquence. Like Aidan and his own master, Theodore, he gathered around him a devoted band of eager pupils, among whom Beda became especially dear to him as the ablest and most promising. Both by his knowledge of history, and rare skill in expounding Holy Scripture, John was well fitted to lay the foundation of such a learner's greatness.

On the left bank of the Tyne, rather more than a mile from Hexham, is a steep hill, the crest of which is now called St John's Lee. When he built there, in an enclosure

bounded by a rampart, a brushwood hedge and a trench, his famous hermitage and a chapel in honour of St Michael, the place had long been the lonely haunt of eagles and was therefore known as Harneshalg, or Erneshow, that is Eagle's Mount. Close by was an ancient burial ground used by the inhabitants of Hexham. To that hermitage, in Lent and at other times when the smiling course of events left him free, he used to retire, with a few chosen comrades, for devotional reading and meditation. 'Like his namesake,' wrote James Raine the younger, 'among the apostolic brotherhood, who was well acquainted with the hermit's life, John would recognize a symbol as well as a companion in the flying eagle. There was little to disturb the repose of either save the tread and the voices of mourners as they were carrying some bier up the green hillside; and when the echoes awoke the king of birds in his eyrie, and the flap of ascending wings was heard, the hermit would look out of his little cell to bid the passers-by godspeed, and offer a prayer for the peace of a departed brother. Another wanderer had fallen asleep while he was still watching, and he would long to hasten the time when his own spirit should mount up with wings as eagles' and soar away.'

Between John and the scholar king Aldfrith there existed such close sympathy, intellectual and spiritual, that the shy hermit was, almost as a matter of course, chosen, after Eata's death, to fill the vacant see of Hexham; but probably because he had, at the date of the vacancy, not quite attained the canonical age of thirty, ten months elapsed before, on August 25, 687, archbishop Theodore had the pleasure of consecrating his beloved pupil. The diocese was bounded on the north and south by the rivers Alne and Tees; westward its extreme outpost was Wetheral, on the hither side of Carlisle; eastward its frontier was the seashore.

'Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ,' was one of the precepts which John tried to enforce

by his own practice. It was therefore his custom, during his Lenten retirement, to have with him some luckless dweller in the neighbourhood, whose heavy load of poverty or ill-health he might at any rate ease by sympathy, if he could not do more. His most notable Lenten achievement had for its object a dumb lad who had long been in the habit of begging alms from him, and was also afflicted with an itching disease of the scalp, very painful to behold. John assigned him, at the beginning of Lent, a small hut in the hermitage enclosure, and sent him thither his daily allowance of victuals. On the second Sunday of Lent, having, doubtless, in the interval offered unceasing and earnest prayer on the lad's behalf, John bade him enter his own cell and began to cure his dumbness. First the lad put out his tongue; then, grasping him by the chin, John made on the tongue the sign of the cross. After that ceremony the lad learnt his first lesson in speaking by obeying, one after another, these orders:

'Say the word Yea, the letter A, the letter B,' and so on.

From letters he proceeded to syllables, thence to words and sentences. During the remainder of that day and the following night, as long as he could keep awake, he amazed the bystanders by bringing out of their hiding-place, for the first time in his life, his thoughts and wishes. Having thus taught the lad to find his voice, the good bishop entrusted the healing of the scalp to the skill of a leech, whom he aided with his own prayers and blessing. So complete was the cure that, on the bare and ugly patch of skin, soon grew, instead of a few bristles, a beautiful crop of curly hair. Though filled with joyous gratitude, the lad declined the offer of a permanent place in the bishop's household, preferring to return home. In memory of that signal deed of mercy, there was founded at Leeds, on June 25, 1896, the Deaf and Dumb Guild of St John of Beverley. In the following jubilee year, 1897, the Guild placed a statue of John in the north tower of Beverley Minster, to com-

memorate the progress made, during the reign of queen Victoria, in the education of the British deaf. There is also in the Minster a memorial window, thus described by a brass tablet on the wall beneath it:

‘The above window was erected to the Glory of God by the Deaf and Dumb Guild of St John of Beverley, May 28, 1904.’

In the year 692, at the early age of nineteen, Beda was ordained deacon, and eleven years later priest, by his beloved and honoured master. Ten years after the former event, one year before the latter, John was one of Wilfrith's opponents at the witanagemot of Austerfield: he was named, with Bosa, in the letters of Pope John VI to Aldfrith, Ethelred and Brihtwald. At the witanagemot of Nidd, in 705, he exchanged with Wilfrith the kiss of peace. With John's name is associated no other recorded event of the eighteen years during which he occupied the see of Hexham. But the large privilege of sanctuary possessed by the church must have widened the range of his influence, both as peacemaker between foes and as upholder of justice against lawless violence. From king Ecgfrith Wilfrith had obtained the ordinance that, within a mile of the church, no force was to be used towards any man. The privilege thus granted and repeatedly confirmed by popes, archbishops, bishops and kings, Scotch as well as English, was in course of time also conferred on the churches of Ripon, York, Beverley and Durham. At Hexham not only were victims of bloodfeud and persons charged with crime thereby protected, but, in time of war, refugees and their movable goods were assured of safety from invading armies. Four crosses on the north, south, east and west, mark the boundary of the privilege. The southern cross secured a fugitive who had swum or waded the Tyne beyond mid Channel; but floods so shifted this boundary that the cross was placed on the north bank, which is still known as the Cross Bank. The site of the western cross, about a quarter of a mile out on the road from

Hexham to Carlisle, bears the name Maiden Cross. The eastern cross stood on the land now known as White Cross fields.

In a charter of Henry I, confirming one of Edward the Confessor, six degrees of propinquity are distinguished, namely (1) within the crosses, (2) within the town, (3) within the walls of the burial ground which surrounded the church, (4) within the church, (5) within the chancel, (6) on the frith stool, a stone seat which stood near the altar. For seizing a fugitive within any of the first five degrees the penalty was a fine, eight pounds for the first, thirty-two for the second, thirty-six for the third, ninety-six for the fourth, one hundred and forty-four for the fifth. The molestation of a person actually seated on the frith stool, or even standing near the shrine of relics behind the altar, being too gross an act of sacrilege to be punished by a mere fine, forfeited the offender's life.

On the death of Bosa in the year 705 John, after he had surrendered to Wilfrith the see of Hexham, became bishop of York. In that city, adjoining his own house, he found another church dedicated to St Michael, whither, as at Erneshow, he could retire for hours of lonely communion with God. Round his fame clustered a legend, rich in poetic fancy, which gave the following sensuous expression to men's assured belief that the Sun of Righteousness so enlightened the good bishop's mind as to shut out from his thoughts every darkening shadow of error. While ecstatic adoration held him rapt before the altar of that church, above his kneeling figure appeared, amid flashes of resplendent flame, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a gleaming dove. To outside watchers the flood of glory emitted through every pane seemed such an effulgence as might proceed from the sun's own orb, if it were to leave its place in the sky and shut itself up in the church. For one of John's deacons, named Sigga, an outside view was not enough. Hoping to share with his master the glorious

vision in all its fullness, he gently pushed open the church door and entered on tiptoe. There before him knelt the holy father, with uplifted hands, straining his gaze heavenward and pouring out his soul, like a foaming cascade, in the sight of God; on his head rested a dove whiter than snow. Dazzled and scorched by the blinding radiance, Sigga promptly paid the penalty due to his prying rashness. The flesh of his face became wizened and wrinkled. John soon felt conscious of the intruder's presence, but in wrath remembered mercy and restored, by stroking them with his hand, normal smoothness to the furrowed features.

Among the witan who used to assemble, at the bidding of the young king Osred, to set in order the affairs, civil and spiritual, of the realm, none was held in higher honour than John. Whether wrongs had to be righted, or laws to be improved, or disputes to be settled on the fairest possible terms, respectful heed was paid by all to the words of inspired wisdom that fell from his lips. On one occasion, after the witenagemot had transacted all its business, Osred and the others accepted John's invitation to a banquet. His chief butler, Brithred, provided three full jars of liquor, which seemed to be so inexhaustible that the bishop was credited with a miracle and more highly esteemed than ever. One of the jars contained wine, another ale, the third a sweet ferment of mulberry juice and spiced honey.

Among the religious houses of Deira visited by John in his circuits was a convent of nuns at Walton, midway between Beverley and Driffield, ruled by an abbess named Heriburh. One of his visits is thus described by his pupil and deacon Bercthun:

' On our arrival we were right joyfully welcomed by the whole community. Then the abbess told us that one of the nuns, her own daughter in body as well as in spirit, was seriously ill. She had lately been bled in the arm, and,







while under treatment, was gripped with sudden pain, which went from bad to worse, and inflamed the wounded arm till it swelled to such a size that a pair of hands could not encircle it. She was then lying on her bed in an agony of suffering that seemed the prelude to death. The abbess, therefore, believing that the bishop's blessing or touch would do the patient good, begged him to enter her cell. As soon however as, in answer to his enquiry, he learnt that the bleeding had taken place when the moon was in the middle of the first quarter, "Thou and thy people," said he, "acted very foolishly and ignorantly in bleeding her at that time. I remember being told by archbishop Theodore of blessed memory, that it is quite dangerous to bleed a person while the moon is waxing and the spring tide rising. If the girl is really dying, what can I do for her?"

'The abbess loved her daughter too well to be so easily put off, and had, moreover, determined that she was to be the next abbess. Yielding to her urgent entreaties, John entered the invalid's room and took me with him. She was lying, as I said, in the grip of severe pain, and her arm was so swollen that it would not bend at the elbow. Standing by her bedside, the bishop said a prayer over her and gave her his blessing; then left the room. Afterwards, at the usual hour, we sat down to dinner. Then somebody appeared in the doorway, beckoned me out and said, "Cwenburh"—that was the nun's name—"wants thee to return to her speedily." I did so, and on entering found her looking more cheerful, as though out of danger. While I sat by her bedside, "Wouldest thou like us," she said, "to send for something to drink?"

"Ay, that I would," was my answer, "and right glad am I that thou feelest able to drink." A cup was set before us; we both drank; then she began to speak. "From the moment of the bishop's departure, after he had finished praying for me and blessing me, I began forthwith to feel better. Although I have not yet recovered my former strength, nevertheless, in spite of the fact that my arm is still swollen, all the pain has passed away as completely as though the bishop himself had carried it out with him."

‘ While we were departing from the convent the flight of the pain was being rapidly followed by flight of the dreaded swelling. Thus snatched from an untimely death, the maiden, together with the other sisters, returned thanks to the Lord her Saviour.’

Noteworthy features of this tale are the hereditary tenure of the abbacy, and the freedom of intercourse enjoyed by brother Berethun and sister Cwenburh.

As he travelled about in the East Riding, John found, ensconced amid wild stretches of forest and lake, a charming fairyland called, from its situation, In Dera Wuda, or Inderawood, that is, among the woods of Deira. The later name, Beverlac or Beverley, is derived by some authorities from the beavers which gambolled in the river Hull. A small church, dedicated to St John the Evangelist, had already been built there. Bishop John so closely identified himself with the place that it has always been associated with his name. He bought the ground, added a choir to the church, and founded beside it a monastery, of which Berethun was first abbot. South of the church he built another, dedicated to St Martin, together with a convent for nuns. To endow these two houses he bought estates in Ridings, Welwick, Bilton and Patrington. To this endowment one wealthy neighbour generously added the manor of Cherry Burton, together with the advowson of its church; another the manor of Walkington.

About two miles from that new monastery dwelt one of the king’s companion thanes named Puch. A church he built in his neighbourhood was, at his request, dedicated by bishop John, who had with him Berethun and some of the brethren. It so happened that Puch’s wife had then, for three weeks, been confined to her bed by a painful illness. Some of the water that had been blessed for the dedication was taken to her from the bishop by one of the brethren. After she had tasted it and her sores had been bathed with

the rest, she arose, feeling quite well, and followed the example of the apostle Peter's mother-in-law, by serving her husband and his holy guests at their meal. The bishop had been most reluctant to break his fast in the thane's house, and had yielded to Puch's entreaty only when it was seconded by Bercthun and emphasized by the promises of both to give alms to the poor. If, as may be fairly assumed, John used the Gallo-Roman ritual in his dedications, twelve candles, placed at intervals round the building, were first lighted, symbolizing the twelve apostles, through whom the Light of the World shines on the Church. Behind the candles, on the walls of the church, were marked twelve crosses, recalling the twelve foundations of Rev. xxi, 14. Then, after he and his clergy had donned their robes, he thrice struck with his pastoral staff the lintel of the closed door, saying:

Lift up your heads O ye gates!

Before the door was opened all joined in the antiphonal chanting of Psalm xxiv. As they entered, they uttered the greeting

Peace be unto this house.

While all were kneeling before the altar, he said this prayer:

'Magnify Thyself, O Lord, our God, in Thy saints, and show Thyself in this temple of Thy building, in order that Thou, to whose mighty working Thy adopted ones owe all they have, mayest Thyself be always praised in Thy heritage; through Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Then, beginning at the left-hand corner on the east, the bishop wrote with the point of his staff, along the floor, which had been sprinkled with ashes, the capital letters of the Greek alphabet; and, in like manner, beginning at the right-hand corner on the east, the capital letters of the Latin alphabet. The two alphabets were intertwined saltire-

wise, to symbolize the union of East with West in one Church. After water and salt had been by him exorcized and blessed, the bishop mixed them, moistened his finger, and made the sign of the cross on the four horns of the altar. Then, standing in front of the altar, he sprinkled it seven times with hyssop, chanting first the verse,

Thou wilt sprinkle me, Lord, with hyssop,  
And I shall be clean;

then the whole of Psalm li. Next he sprinkled, inside, the walls of the church, singing Psalm lxxviii. Two or three of the clergy were then sent to sprinkle the walls on the outside, singing psalms as they went, while the bishop himself walked from the altar down the middle of the church, sprinkling to right and left, and making on the floor the sign of the cross.

Then followed this prayer:

‘O God of Holiness, Almighty Ruler, whose loving-kindness is felt to be endless, who settest their bounds to both heavenly and earthly things, keeping Thy compassion for Thy people that walk in full view of Thy glory: give ear to the prayers of Thy servants and let Thine eyes be opened day and night upon this temple, founded in honour of St ———. In the fullness of Thy mercy dedicate it, shed on it the light of Thy compassion, shine on it with the radiance of Thy own glory. Gently welcome every man that cometh to worship in this place, look on him kindly; for Thy great Name’s sake gladly shield and graciously hear all who in this Thy dwelling-place beg the protection of Thy strong right hand and outstretched arm: keep them for ever safe, in order that, always happy, always rejoicing in awe of Thee, they may stedfastly abide in the catholic faith of the Holy Trinity. Through Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who in union with Thee ever liveth and reigneth.’

After the chanting of another psalm the bishop poured out at the foot of the altar all the rest of the water, and

wiped the altar with a towel. Then he offered incense and smeared oil on the altar, making with it the sign of the cross in the middle and at the four corners, while Psalm lxxxvii was being sung. Next he anointed with his hand the stone altar slab, while a priest carried incense round the altar. The oil ritual was repeated with chrism, a mixture of oil and balsam, symbolic of the union of kingly with priestly dignity. Next came the prayer:

‘ O Almighty God, in whose honour, unworthy though we be, we are, after calling on Thy Name, consecrating this altar, mercifully hear our humble prayers and grant that our offerings on this table may be acceptable to Thee. Shed on them always the dew of Thy Holy Spirit, in order that, whenever members of Thy family pray to Thee in this place, Thou mayst lighten the load of their anxious cares, listen to their petitions, receive their vows, strengthen their desires, grant their requests. ’

Then followed the blessing of the vessels and ornaments to be used in the church: patens, chalices, crosses, thuribles, candlesticks and vestments. A celebration of the Holy Eucharist, with appropriate special prayers, closed the proceedings.

The donor of Cherry Burton to the Beverley brotherhood was a thane named Addi. When John dedicated the church of that township, Addi's favourite manservant had lost the use of his limbs and was lying so surely, as it seemed, at the point of death that his coffin and graveclothes had been made ready at his bedside. Addi could not restrain his tears when he besought the bishop's aid. John followed him to the room, said a prayer, blessed the hardly conscious invalid, and, as he left the room, greeted him in the usual form of words:

‘ Thou wilt soon, I hope, be quite well. ’

While host and guests were afterwards feasting, the servant gladdened his master by sending to ask him for a beaker of wine. When he had drunk it he rose and dressed,

entered the hall, greeted the bishop and the other guests, was bidden to join them, ate, drank and made merry. Thus marvellously restored to health, he lived many years to glorify God by faithful service.

Among John's clergy was one named Herebald, who had been from boyhood a favourite pupil, assiduous both in reading and in chanting. One day, while they were all, bishop, clergy and pupils, travelling together on horseback, they came to a wide stretch of level ground which invited the younger members of the party to race their horses at a gallop. John at first refused them leave, deeming the sport too frivolous, but at last gave way to their united eagerness. Herebald alone was strictly forbidden, though he was longing to try the paces of a fine horse lately given him by the bishop himself. After a while neither he nor his beast could any longer tamely look on at excellent sport. Together, therefore, they bolted from his master's side, heedless of the shouted warning:

'Woe is me that thou thus dost gallop!'

After leaping a chasm the impetuous steed stumbled. Herebald was violently thrown and struck with his head a stone barely hidden by the soil. The thumb of the hand he thrust forward to save himself was put out of joint. The time was then past noon. As he lay senseless, his grieving comrades spread over him a tent. Towards evening he showed signs of life and was carried home. All night he lay speechless, spitting blood from an internal lesion. By his side knelt in distressful prayer his doleful master, and at dawn, calling him by name, asked: 'Knowest thou me?'

Opening his eyes, he answered:

'Yea, thou art my dear bishop.'

'Canst thou live?' asked John.

'Thy prayers are strong enough to keep me alive, if God will.'

Laying his hands on Herebald's head, John then spoke, in a voice broken with emotion, a few words of blessing,

and betook himself again to prayer. Returning, a short while later, to the bedside, he found the patient sitting up and able to talk. Prompted by one of those inward impulses the source of which is so mysterious, he closely questioned him about his baptism:

‘Art thou quite sure it was valid?’

Herebald answered that he felt no doubt on the subject; but when he named the priest who had done him that service, the bishop replied:

‘If he baptized thee, thy baptism was certainly not valid. The man is well known to me. After he had been ordained priest I found him too dullwitted to learn the order for catechizing or the baptismal office. I therefore ordered him to abstain altogether from that department of ministerial duty.’

Having thus spoken, John proceeded without further delay to catechize his pupil, and ended by puffing breath towards his face, in order doubtless to exorcize the demon of disobedience. Herebald’s bruised skull was then bandaged by a leech whom John summoned to his aid. Next day, master and pupil continued their journey, riding side by side. Not long afterwards, having fully recovered, Herebald was thoroughly well drenched in a font with the water of life. In course of time he became abbot of Tyne-mouth and there won honour till his death in the year 745.

As he grew older, John became more and more deeply attached to his peaceful retreat at Beverley and the family of spiritual sons he had there settled. His care for their welfare, spiritual and temporal, made his visits more frequent. The weakness inseparable from advancing age made him willing to accept from Bercthun, at the end of a long day’s work, the refreshment of a hot bath and a drink of wine.

In the year 718, feeling overburdened by the toil and care that fall to the lot of a bishop, John resigned the see of



York and procured the election, in his stead, of a priest named Wilfrith, who had been his pupil. He then enjoyed at Beverley three peaceful years of close communion with the Master he had so faithfully served. There, on May 7, 721, he passed into life through the gate of death. His body was buried beneath the St Peter's porch of his own beloved church.

In course of time John's bones were enshrined above ground in a carved wooden feretory. In the year 1037 he was formally canonized by pope Benedict IX. On October 25 of that year his bones were, by Alfric archbishop of York, again enshrined in a more sumptuous feretory, decked with gold, silver and jewels. The fire which, in September, 1187, consumed Beverley minster, also destroyed that shrine. In the year 1198 the carefully preserved ashes of the saint were freshly enshrined. In 1664, while a grave was being dug at the entrance to the choir, they were found in an inscribed leaden case, and reburied. They were again brought to light in the year 1736.

## CHAPTER XXXV

## WILFRITH FULFILLING HIS DESTINY

His life was like an April day (and a day thereof is a month for variety) often interchangeably fair and foul; and after many alterations he set fair in full lustre at last.

Thomas Fuller, Church History of Britain

**T**IME the healer had been working in favour of Wilfrith. On May 21, 686, Eormenburh, no longer a haughty and vindictive queen but a gentle abbess, kept the first anniversary of Ecgrith's death, the consequence of his own wilful infatuation. Theodore, in his eighty-fifth year, was warned by symptoms of disease that no long time was left for him to garner sheaves of peace, and was doubtless filled with generous admiration of Wilfrith's apostolic work in Sussex. His reconciliation with his deposed suffragan took place under the roof of Erkenwald, bishop of London, who was eminently fitted by nobility of character to play the part of mediator. To Ethelred king of Mercia the archbishop wrote, beseeching him to reinstate in his favour the venerable man who had by his patience won possession of his soul. With gladdening promptness Ethelred welcomed Wilfrith to his court, restored to him many monastic estates and paid him the highest honour. The friendship thus readily bestowed proved to be lifelong.

To Aldfrith, king of Northumbria, and Alfred, abbess of Whitby, Theodore wrote in the same strain and thus procured Wilfrith's restoration first to the abbacy of Hexham, then to the bishopric of York, whence Bosa retired to make way for him. After the death, on October 26, 686, of Eata, he administered the diocese of Hexham till Sunday, August 25, 687, when John of Beverley was conse-

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crated to that see. On the death of Cuthbert he also administered the diocese of Lindisfarne during the year that elapsed before the consecration of Eadberht. Thus, during five months of the year 687, Wilfrith was, as of yore, chief pastor of all Northumbria; not, however, of the domain whose borders had been enlarged by Winwidfield but of the contracted realm as it remained after Nechtansmere. For some time, avers Eddi, his intercourse with Aldfrith was serenely peaceful, and they found keen enjoyment in comparing the treasures that stored their minds. Then, while it grew clearer and clearer that the arrogant bishop treated his partial restoration as merely an instalment of his rights, disputes between them became more and more frequent. Aldfrith was by birth half Scotie and must have known by heart the Iona version of the Whitby Conference. Wilfrith's former opponents were doubtless ready to foment the king's irritation.

If it be true that Theodore expressed, before his death on September 19, 690, a wish that Wilfrith might succeed him, that wish seems to have been set at naught; but nearly two years elapsed before, on July 1, 692, Brihtwald, abbot of Reculver, was elected, Wihtred and Swefheard being then joint kings of Kent. Further delay was caused by the new archbishop's unwillingness to be consecrated by any of his suffragans. On St Peter's day, June 29, 693, his consecration took place at Lyon, the leader in the ceremony being Godwin, the archbishop of that city and metropolitan of Gaul. On Sunday, the following August 31, he was duly enthroned in the basilica of the Saviour at Canterbury.

Meanwhile, in the year 691, Wilfrith had been expelled from Northumbria, welcomed by Ethelred and installed at Leicester as bishop of the Middle Angles. His quarrel with Aldfrith was threefold; first because certain lands had been alienated from the churches dedicated to St Peter in York and Ripon and thus, in his view, stolen from that

Prince of the Apostles; secondly, because of a proposal to change into the see of a bishopric the monastery of Ripon, which had always been specially dear to him and peculiarly his own; thirdly, because he was unwilling to obey the decrees of Theodore, which in the name of St Peter three popes had annulled, for the division of his original diocese. It may be inferred that he wanted to oust John and Eadberht from their sees, and that he wore out the king's patience by his obstinate persistence. Such unchristlike self-assertion was too thinly disguised by his pretended zeal for the honour of the great Fisher of men.

When the see of Leicester was first carved out of the Mercian diocese it was assigned to Cuthwin, of whom nothing more is known. On his death that see was reunited with Lichfield, then Saxulf's and afterwards, before the admission of Wilfrith to Leicester, Hedda's. A short while later Bosel was compelled by illness to resign the see of Worcester. At Ethelred's request, the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury being vacant, Wilfrith consecrated Oftfor, a monk of Whitby, who had been unanimously chosen to succeed Bosel. After completing his training, first in Kent under Theodore and then at Rome, the new bishop had been an active preacher, by example as well as by word, among the Hwiccas who inhabited his diocese and were then ruled by a subking named Osric. His tenure of the bishopric was very soon cut short by death. Beda is strangely silent about the more famous Ecgrin, who then reluctantly succeeded him, yielding to the unanimous insistence of clergy and laity. That scion of the royal stock had, very early in life, renounced the world and in due time won promotion to priesthood. His efforts to purify the morals of his converts made him so unpopular that he was driven for a time from his diocese. The monastery he founded about the year 706, in a forest given him by his kinsman Ethelred, took its name Evesham from Eoves, one of the four swineherds he employed. After he had buried at

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Malmesbury the body of Aldhelm, Ecgwin escorted to Rome Coenred of Mercia and Offa of Essex, who had followed Ethelred's example by abdicating. He soon returned thence and lived on until December 30, 717.

. In the year 693, while the see of Canterbury was still vacant, Swidbert crossed from Friesland to receive episcopal consecration from Wilfrith for missionary work abroad, and brought him saddening news of the complete relapse into idolatry of the Frisians who had been baptized by him in the winter of 678. They had lately been subdued by Pippin of Heristal, under whose patronage Wilbrord and his companions were then trying to convert them.

For ten years the current of Wilfrith's life in Mercia flowed smoothly enough, except for the painful shock caused by the tragic death of the devout and strenuous queen Osthryth, who was, in the year 697, slain by her own ealdormen, perhaps in trying to quell some revolt. Then, in the year 702, he accepted an invitation to attend a moot held in the marchland between Mercia and Deira, at Austerfield near Bawtry. Aldfrith had summoned thither archbishop Brihtwald and nearly all the English bishops. Whatever hopes may have been cherished of reconciliation were completely shattered. Wilfrith reproached his opponents for their contumacy in withstanding, for twenty-two years, the papal decrees in his favour; they blamed his unpatriotic presumption in seeking foreign aid against the lawful authority of king and archbishop. During an adjournment, while he was conferring with his abbots, a king's thane, one of the many who had been, in boyhood, entrusted to his care, more loyal to him than to the king, slipped in disguise out of the royal tent, mingled with the spearsmen on guard, and so found his way to his beloved master, whom he warned of a trap that was being laid for him, and then disappeared. Soon afterwards Wilfrith had reason to feel grateful for the warning. One of the bishops came to enquire whether he was willing to submit unreservedly to

the arbitration of the archbishop and give a written pledge to that effect. Brihtwald's intention was to quash Wilfrith's title to all the lands he had ever held in Northumbria, and to alienate those he had acquired in Mercia. As the messenger professed his ignorance of the object of the message, Wilfrith of course refused to take any such leap in the dark and repeated his refusal at the next meeting of the council. Enraged by his baffling wariness, king and archbishop then showed their hand by proposing to strip him so bare that in neither kingdom would he have left even the site of a single cell. Such merciless severity disgusted even his old opponents. Finally they offered him Ripon and its endowments on condition that he did not stir, without the king's permission, beyond the precinct nor undertake any episcopal work. Infuriated by this insulting proposal, he burst out in an angry torrent of words, reminding them of the lead he had taken, for nearly forty years, in 'uprooting the noxious weeds planted by the Scots,' teaching anti-phonical music and introducing the Benedictine rule. 'How,' he indignantly concluded, 'with my conscience clear of guilt, can I give judgement against myself? Since ye have reopened this controversy in order to degrade me from my holy office, I make my confident appeal to the apostolic see. Whichever of you is bold enough to declare before the wise men of Rome your reasons for degrading me, let him go thither with me.'

Infuriated in his turn by such stubborn contempt of court, Aldfrith proposed to Brihtwald that their aged victim be arrested by the spearsmen and compelled to submit. He was reminded by the bishops that Wilfrith would not have been there unless the king's honour had been pledged for his safe conduct. 'Let us all,' said they, 'go home in peace.' Informed by his friends of these futile negotiations, Ethelred, who had probably been one of their chief promoters, assured him that the lands which provided the livelihood of his Mercian monks would be held in trust

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for them until authoritative instructions came from Rome. The deplorable virulence in those days of party feeling among the Northumbrians may be gathered from the next move against the exiled bishop. He and his adherents were banned by an order that all laymen should throw away, as though offered to idols, any food which an abbot or priest belonging to one of his communities had blessed by making over it, the sign of the cross and had afterwards left uneaten.

Among Wilfrith's companions on his third journey to Rome was a priest named Acca, who had been trained from boyhood among the clergy of Bosa, and had, when that bishop resigned the see of York, attached himself to the restored bishop. He fully shared his master's love of stately buildings and ornate ritual; he was also a highly skilled chanter and an enthusiastic collector, not only of relics, but of books. In Friesland they found at work, as missionary archbishop of Utrecht, the famous Wilbrord, who had spent his boyhood in the minster of Ripon and witnessed the consecration of St Peter's Church. In the year, 678, of Wilfrith's deposition, being then twenty years old, he had migrated to Ireland, the home of missionary zeal. From him they heard many tales about the wonder-working power of Oswald's relics. Though Wilfrith was in his seventieth year, he walked all the way thence to his destination. Pope John VI, who had already won renown as a peacemaker, welcomed them kindly, and when Brihtwald's envoys had also arrived, bringing a written accusation, formed a synod of bishops to try the case. Wilfrith's petition made his usual complaints, but ended by professing his willingness to waive his claim to the see of York if only he might keep the monasteries of Ripon and Hexham. At the second hearing the pope's assessors talked and jested about the matter in tones too low to be overheard. Seventy times in the course of four months that august tribunal met to hear the numerous charges, but what they were can

hardly be imagined. As the sun of truth, we are assured by Eddi, shone more and more brightly, Wilfrith's spotless innocence became clearer and clearer. It was then discovered that, twenty-five years ago, he had taken part in the Council of Agatho against the Monotheletes and the record of his testimony was publicly read aloud. No sooner was he thus identified than there arose, in his favour, a noisy outburst of popular feeling. His accusers, men cried, ought to be thrust into dungeons and starved to death. The fact that, of Brihtwald's agents, one was only a deacon and all the rest mere laymen, was itself regarded as an insult to the apostolic see.

The dreary recurrence, on so many consecutive days, of paltry examination and cross-examination seems to have sated even the litigious pilgrim; when it was all over he longed to spend in Rome the eventide of his toilsome life. His body also was becoming too weak an instrument for his indomitable spirit. But the Pope and all the bishops of the synod bade him return home and gladden his friends with the news of his triumph over his foes. It can hardly be doubted that the extension through him of papal authority had been, from the outset of the proceedings, their main object. As usual he went the round of all the shrines and formed a large collection of labelled relics; he also bought costly vestments of silk and purple to adorn the ritual in his churches. The passage of the Alps so exhausted him that in Gaul he was compelled first to ride on horseback, then to let himself be carried in a litter. At Meaux, about twenty miles north-east of Paris, he broke down and became unconscious; for four days and nights neither food nor drink passed his lips; only his light breathing and the warmth of his limbs showed that he was yet alive. When, early on the fifth day, he had recovered consciousness, he called for Acca; and when the watchers had left the room, confided to him a vision in which the archangel Michael had revealed himself by name. The tearful prayers of Wil-



frith's dependents for his recovery, so ran the angelic message, had been effectually seconded by the intercession of the Virgin Mary. A peaceful ending to his life had been granted, but to her he must render the same honour as to St Peter and St Andrew, by building her a church. The archangel promised to visit him again four years later.

The party soon resumed their journey and reached Sandwich without further mishap. Wilfrith's messengers found Brihtwald in a friendly mood, consequent on the stringency of the papal decree, which his agents had already delivered to him. Escorted by a crowd of abbots, the weary wayfarer travelled westward to London, thence northward in search of Ethelred, who was no longer king of Mercia but abbot of Bardney. After they had embraced and kissed, the precious parchment, with dangling bulls and seals, was produced and read. Ethelred promised literal obedience, so far as his utmost exertion could influence his nephew and successor, Coenred.

To Aldfrith was then sent an abbot named Badwine and a catechist named Alfrith, seeking leave for Wilfrith to visit him. The king kept them waiting a few days and then gave them his answer:

'Brothers both, whom I deeply respect, ask of me whatever ye need for yourselves and I will gladly give it you. But from this day forward demand of me nothing on behalf of your master Wilfrith. The dooms of the kings my predecessors and their archbishop, my own later dooms, which were also, like the former, those of an archbishop commissioned by the apostolic see and of nearly all the bishops in Britain, none of them will I ever change, as long as I live, on account of documents which ye call papal.'

These ungracious but thoroughly justifiable words must have been spoken in the summer or autumn of the year 704. Neither king nor pope had then long to live. Aldfrith died at Driffeld on December 14, 704, John died in January, 705. For two months after Aldfrith's death a usurper

named Eadwulf held the reins of power in Northumbria. Wilfrith had ventured as far as Ripon, and sent him thence a conciliatory message. In answer came the savage threat:

‘By my hope of weal I swear that unless he depart from my realm within six days every mate of his that I find will be put to death.’

Aldfrith had left a son named Osred, only eight years old, whose guardian was an ealdorman named Berhtfrith. They and their party were holding Bamborough against a besieging force sent thither by Eadwulf. No sooner, according to Eddi, had they vowed that, if God would give Osred his father’s kingdom, they would obey the papal decree about Wilfrith, than the besiegers changed sides and helped Berhtfrith to depose Eadwulf in favour of Osred. In the first year, 705, of this boy king’s reign, archbishop Brihtwald travelled northward to attend a witenagemot which met in Nidderdale, probably at the village called Nidd. He and Wilfrith arrived on the same day and found awaiting them, besides Osred and Berhtfrith, several ealdormen, bishops Bosa of York, Eadfrith of Lindisfarne and John of Hexham, their abbots and the abbess Alfed, who is described as ‘ever the consoler and best counsellor of the whole province.’ After bidding them pray that their hearts might be filled with love of peace, the archbishop obtained leave to read the papal letters received by himself and king Aldfrith. For the benefit of Berhtfrith and others who knew no Latin, he then explained in English their pith and marrow. The decree confirmed the award of Agatho, Benedict and Sergius, and exhorted Brihtwald to summon such a synod as he was then attending. If Bosa and John, it continued, could come to terms with Wilfrith, well and good; if not, they must all appear in person at Rome before another council, even more influential than the former. These letters, as well as the letter to Ethelred, concluded

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with earnest appeals, bidding them all bestir themselves in the interest of peace and in support of papal authority.

The reluctance of Bosa and John to yield an inch of ground was so far overcome by the others, especially by Alfred, that the monasteries of Hexham and Ripon were restored to Wilfrith, together with all his endowments; but no episcopal work was given him. This was the very compromise he himself had suggested in his petition. After the four Northumbrian prelates had embraced and exchanged the kiss of peace, a solemn celebration of the Holy Eucharist fitly closed the proceedings. Later in the same year Bosa died. John succeeded him as bishop of York and resigned to Wilfrith the see of Hexham. Alfred, so Eddi avers, prevailed by assuring them that, when she and the abbess Oidilburh of Hackness had stood by Aldfrith's deathbed, he had expressed deep contrition for his treatment of Wilfrith.

'Wonderful is God in his holy dealings,' thankfully exclaims Eddi, at this point of his narrative, 'who for love of the whole Church crowned with healthful peace the souls of those leaders. For both parties it was the greatest of blessings; for those on the one hand who, year after year, had kept possession of his property and at last, of their own freewill, made, in the peace of Christ, restitution to our prelate before his death; and, on the other hand, for us and our people, who, during his different periods of exile, were scattered abroad and served unsympathetic masters, but now live with our own dear master, at peace and in harmony with all men, overflowing with joyous hope of life.'

On his way to Hexham Wilfrith was laid so low by a fresh attack of deathlike weakness that his dependents feared, so Eddi naively admits, he might pass away without making any provision for them out of his estates. Their prayers for his recovery were therefore continuous and insistent; from all quarters his abbots and anchorets hastened

to his bedside. Again he recovered, as though awaking out of sleep, and enjoyed for another year and a half the use of all his faculties.

A short while before his death he made his will by word of mouth at Ripon, in the presence of two abbots and six faithful brethren. One of the six may have been his adopted son Eodwald, who was with him when he sent messengers to Eadwulf. He ordered his shining hoard of gold, silver and jewels to be opened, divided into four heaps and displayed in their presence. The sight of such a hoard would have made his models, Benedict and Gregory, turn in their graves. After telling them that he had hoped once more to make the pilgrimage to Rome and there end his days, he bade them send to the Roman churches of the Virgin Mary and St Paul the best heap of the four. Of the other three he gave one, 'for the ransom' of his soul, to the poor among his people, and another in equal shares to the abbots of Hexham and Ripon in order that they might therewith buy the favour of kings and bishops. The last heap he left for distribution, according to the need of each, among the comrades who had shared with him the toils and hardships of exile, and to whom he had not already given landed estates; in order that they might have enough to keep them after his departure. This would have been perfectly proper, even praiseworthy, if they had not been, by the Benedictine rule, bound to earn their own living and be always penniless. An interval of silence followed; then feeling, as he said, that his end was nigh, he appointed as joint abbot of Ripon during his life, and sole abbot after his death, his kinsman and bosom friend the priest Tatberht. He thus set at naught a fundamental principle of the Benedictine rule, that the abbot was to be chosen by the whole body of brethren. In obedience to his order, the bell was then tolled to summon the other brethren. When they were all assembled in the chapter-house, their spiritual father entered, seated himself, and thus addressed them:

'Our most venerable brother Caelin, who has long been prior and has worked hard in the Lord to render us our due, now desires to resume his former hermit life. No longer will I detain him. You however I exhort to go on, of your own accord, living by our rule, until, God willing, I come again to you. Here are my two abbots, Tibba and Ebba, sent by Ceolred, king of the Mercians. They have brought me a summons to confer with him about the affairs of my communities which are in his realm. As he promises to order his whole life in accordance with my advice I cannot refuse to go. If my life lasts long enough for me to return to you, I shall bring with me the man whom I have found worthy to be your ruler; but if aught, unforeseen except by God, happen to me, these witnesses of my will who now sit by me, the abbots Tibba and Ebba, the priests Tatberht and Hatfrith, and the catechist Alfrith, will come and name the man whom ye are to welcome and appoint as your abbot. To him always render the obedience ye have promised to God and me.'

On their knees, with tears in their eyes and bowed heads, they promised full obedience to Wilfrith's orders, and received his blessing. They were destined to see his face no more. He did not even reach the presence of Ceolred, to whom, early in that year, Coenred had resigned the kingship.

The aged bishop's last journey across the Humber was a slow progress on horseback, with Tatberht by his side. As each day made him more and more conscious that his course was nearly run, his thoughts travelled backwards through the stirring events of his chequered career and formed vivid images, which were described in glowing words to his companion. He found the monasteries of Mercia in good order, and continued his careful disposition of his overabundant worldly goods. None of his monks was forgotten. Those he met heard from his own lips what gifts of land or money would make their livelihood secure. Again defying the Benedictine rule, but moved by strong affection, he nominated Acca to succeed him as abbot of Hex-

ham. When at last he reached his minster of St Andrew at Oundle, sudden faintness overcame him. His parting exhortations and final blessing were given in a few broken words. Then, without groan or sigh, his head fell back on the pillow. As his worn-out body thus painlessly let him go, on Thursday, October 3, 709, a strange rustling as of birds' wings was heard by the mournful group of bystanders. They felt thereby assured that the sturdy vanquisher of the Dragon and his brood had brought a troop of angels to escort their beloved master to his eternal home. There had been by day and night ceaseless psalmody in the church. At the moment of his death the brethren were chanting Psalm civ, 30:

Thou sendest forth Thy breath, they are created:  
And thou renewest the face of the ground.

When the body had been duly washed and swathed an abbot named Bacula spread on the ground his own silken robe to be wrapped round it before it was placed on the car which bore it across the Humber to a tomb near the south end of the altar in St Peter's, Ripon. Shortly before the Reformation Wilfrith's shrine was seen by Leland at the eastern end of the north aisle of the choir under the arch by the high altar. When he again took his robe, Bacula found it slightly soiled by the feet of the bearers. He therefore rolled it up and bade his servant lad carry it to be cleaned by an abbess named Cynethryth, who ruled one of Wilfrith's houses. While the robe was being washed, a nun recovered the use of a withered hand and arm by dipping them, with Cynethryth's permission, in the warm soapy water and rubbing them with the hallowed silk.

Tatberht's authority as abbot of Ripon enabled him to manifest his reverent affection for his kinsman and spiritual father. Daily mass was said for Wilfrith; in his honour Thursday was, like Sunday, treated as a festival; the

ordinary daily alms were expressly offered for the good of his soul; and on the anniversary of his dies natalis a tithe of flocks and herds was distributed among the poor. The seal of Wilfrith was believed to cure murrain in cattle, and his banner was displayed in the year 1138 at the battle of the Standard.

Until the Reformation the dies natalis or *depositio* of Wilfrith was kept at Ripon as a *duplex festum de majoribus*. On the day itself nine passages of his biography were read as special lessons, and three on every day of the octave. His nativity was commemorated on the first Sunday after Lammas Day, August 1, so called because a loaf (*hlaf*) was then offered as firstfruits of harvest. The commemoration was formerly a *duplex festum principale* and now lasts from Saturday till Tuesday. On Saturday afternoon the official representative of 'Aud-Wilfra,' clad in full canonicals and bearing a crozier, mounts in front of the Town Hall a white palfrey which a man frocked and cowled like a monk leads through the principal streets of the city. Thus, and by holding a fair in the market place, do the loyal citizens still commemorate the triumphal entry of their patron when he came to his own in the summer of 986. On Sunday morning the Mayor and Corporation attend the festival service in the minster. On Monday, the Bank Holiday, and on Tuesday are held the Ripon St Wilfrid races, including the Great St Wilfrid handicap. The revelry incident to this festival fairly commemorates the heathenish rioting which followed the dedication of the original church.

The day, April 24, on which, in the middle of the tenth century, archbishop Odo transferred Wilfrith's bones to Canterbury, was also treated as a festival. They were restored to Ripon by Lanfranc. When, however, that was the date of Easter Eve, his translation was commemorated a week earlier, on the Saturday before Palm Sunday; and when the usual day fell within the Easter octave, it was postponed to the first Tuesday after that octave.

The ancient festival offices were vespers (on the eve), three nocturns, matins, lauds and vespers (on the day). One of the opening prayers of the Nativity first Vespers may be thus translated:

‘O Wilfrith, unconquerable champion of Christ, and our guide, wofully tempest-tossed by land and sea, endurer of much tribulation, prisons and chains, insults and defeats, till thou didst win the glory of a triumphal crown, help us by thy holy intercession to stand firm.’

So multifarious, during the Roman occupation of Britain, was the mingling of races in the neighbourhood of the Wall that, through his mother, Wilfrith’s ancestry may have included some patrician, even imperial, gens of the race thus apostrophized by its greatest poet

Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento.

Inherited instinct may thus have caused him to claim pro-consular authority in the second Roman Empire, which had for its traditional founder the deified Galilean fisherman. Few men moreover have been finer specimens of the type

Justum et tenacem propositi uirum

Non uoltus instantis tyranni

Mente quatit solida.

Not only do his conflicts foreshadow much that is tragic in every age of English history, but his ups and downs make a deeper appeal to all whose hearts have been so attuned by suffering as to become resonance chambers of sympathy for the ‘fataque fortunasque uirum moresque manusque’ of Vergil: the ‘fate and chance and change in human life; high actions and high passions’ of Milton (*Paradise Regained*, IV, 265, 266).



## CHAPTER XXXVI

## ALDHELM, BISHOP OF SHERBORNE

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience. 2 Cor. xii, 12

**O**N July 6, 705, having borne his heavy burden for a whole generation, bishop Haddi finished his earthly course, but not in peace. The annual synod of the preceding year had threatened Wessex with excommunication if the archbishop's order to divide the overgrown diocese of Winchester were disobeyed. There was then, moreover, between Ini and the joint rulers of Essex, Sigehard and Swefred, discord to which Haddi and Waldhere, bishop of London, had willy nilly been made parties. Among the grounds of quarrel was the protection given in Essex to certain exiles from Wessex. Before filling the vacant see a synod assembled by Ini limited the diocese of Winchester to Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Wight and so much of Wiltshire as lay eastward of the land of Malmesbury. The new bishop chosen was Beda's learned friend Daniel, whose birthplace was near Winchester. The rest of Wessex, namely the land of Malmesbury, Dorset, Somerset and Exe vale in Devon, had for its western boundary a line drawn from Exmoor to Teignmouth, and was then formed into a new diocese. By the unanimous voice of clergy and laity, who thronged the place of meeting, Aldhelm was elected bishop of the land he knew and loved so well.

'Too old and feeble am I,' he pleaded, 'for such arduous and anxious work: it is time for me to rest.'

'Nay, father,' they answered, 'the riper in years, the freer from faults, the wiser and readier in counsel!'

When all his excuses had been thus gently set aside, he

yielded to the general wish and was exultingly escorted to Canterbury for consecration. There Brihtwald of course heartily welcomed his old comrade. Together, guided by Hadrian, they had trodden the upward path of learning and piety; they might now share a common burden. Long did he detain his guest, discussing the many tough problems presented by the stubborn human material they were striving to mould into the likeness of their master.

Meanwhile Aldhelm visited Dover. One day, while he was pacing the quay, a trading vessel from Gaul began to unload a cargo of books. Among them, after careful search, he found only one he wanted to buy, namely a complete copy of the whole Bible. Fingering the vellum leaves with the air of an expert he tried to abate the price, but was assailed by a torrent of such abusive slang as never fails Jack Tar at a pinch. 'Blow upon your own rubbish,' was the pith of their remarks, 'and drop cheapening the wares of better folk!' With a merry laugh the venerable bishop continued to haggle, but was rudely hustled. As they spread sail for the outward voyage a sudden squall lashed the waves into a fury that threatened to swamp their ship. Thick masses of cloud turned day into night; the oars creaked, the mast groaned—all the elements seemed in league to destroy the hapless crew. Suddenly it flashed upon their dull wits that this was the reward of their insolence. Stretching therefore shoreward clasped hands, they shouted to Aldhelm for help and promised amendment. As he had felt no anger he promptly forgave. By spreading out both arms he made with his body the sign of the cross. Wind and wave ceased to roar; the sky cleared. Presently he leapt into a boat, was rowed alongside the ship and climbed on board. They begged him to accept the book as a gift in token of their penitence; but he insisted on paying the fair price.

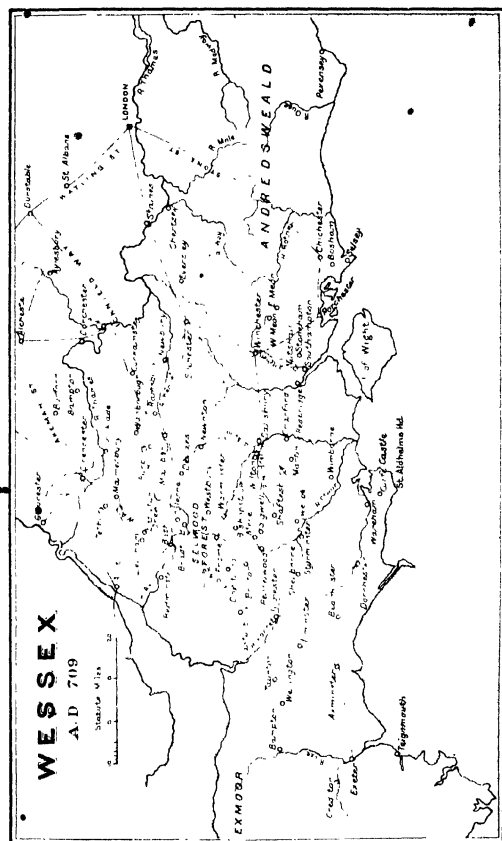
At Sherborne, the see of his bishopric, Aldhelm built a

cathedral church 'of wondrous beauty,' which William of Malmesbury saw before it was replaced by the Norman church of Roger, bishop of Sarum. In the west end of the north wall of the nave may still be seen, blocked up, the jambs of one of Aldhelm's doorways.

'In deference to the urgent entreaty of his monks,' he forbore to relieve himself of the care of his three monasteries, but secured freedom for the election of abbots after his death by a written grant of that privilege which was signed at Wimborne by bishop Daniel as well as by himself, and confirmed, before the end of the year 705, by a witenagemot held at Adderbourne in Wilts, on the banks of the Nodder.

The epithet 'most strenuous' applied by Beda to Aldhelm's episcopal work is eloquently expanded by William, who tells us that his hero redoubled his efforts as he became surer that his end was close at hand. Nights as well as days were spent in preaching. Every parish was duly visited as frequently as possible. Ancient dedications also bear permanent witness both to his untiring exertions and to his affection for his Roman teachers. In Dorset twelve churches, in Somerset thrice as many, are dedicated, like the monastic home of Gregory and Austin, to the holy apostle who followed Jesus without delay. To St Peter and St Paul jointly are dedicated thirteen churches in Somerset, four of which stand near a straight line drawn from Sherborne to Malmesbury. The diocese of Aldhelm is also remarkable for the large number of places whose names end in minster and which must therefore have been 'among the earliest centres of religious activity in Wessex.'

Almost on the base of the forest wedge which the Welsh so stoutly held against the Saxons from 577 till 652 lies a village of the Mendips named Doulting, which Aldhelm had bestowed on the monks of Glastonbury. There, on May 25, 709, while going the ceaseless round of his parishes, he fell suddenly ill, bade his companions carry him into the log hut





which was used as a church and there breathed his last. As the cause of death was probably heart failure, he may have felt, at the age of threescore years, prematurely old.

The sequel is thus told by bishop Ecgwin of Worcester, who was then at Evesham, his own abbey:

‘ Learning by revelation that he was passing away to the Lord, I assembled the brethren and my servants, and informed them that our venerable father would soon be lost to us. A speedy journey brought me to the place where his holy body lay, about fifty miles beyond Malmesbury. Thence I bore it to the cemetery and buried it with due honour. At every halting-place I ordered the erection of a memorial cross.’

Those crosses were called Biscopstane, stones of the bishop. In William’s time they still stood, none the worse for their long weatherbeating. The grateful monks of Glas-tonbury soon replaced the log church of Doultling by a stone one. The present church stands on the same site.

From Doultling to Malmesbury, as the crow flies, the distance is little more than thirty miles. Ecgwin’s fifty were measured along the route of the funeral procession, which moved only by day and halted by night at Frome, Westbury, Bradford, Bath, Colerne and Littleton Drew. The seven stages of the journey were thus nearly equal, each about seven miles. At Bradford and Bath still stand parts of Saxon crosses, similar in design; at Colerne two fragments of another, more ornamental. At Littleton Drew two complementary sculptured stones together form the shaft, six feet high, of another which, though Saxon, was altogether different from those three. Among the scanty remains of its inscription is a complete A, of the same size and type as the Latin letters on the famous Ruthwell cross. The memorial cross seen by William at Malmesbury stood in the Monks’ Cloister. Neither of cloister nor cross does the faintest trace remain. The body was buried in the church of St Michael

and lay there till the year 955. Then the secular clergy whom king Edwy had established at Malmesbury placed the gleaming white bones in the sumptuous shrine which had been, a century earlier, presented to the monastery by king Athelwulf. At the close of the tenth century the bones were hidden underground from the Danish invaders of Wessex.

But for two remarkable cures, there they would have been left, so haughty was the contempt of Normans for English saints. Early in the year 1078 a fisherman from the Isle of Wight, who had been blinded three years ago by a squall of wind, was directed in a dream to Malmesbury, spent a week prostrate before the altar of the abbey church and then, after they had dripped blood, recovered full use of his eyes. Consequently the bones of his patron were, on the dies natalis, solemnly unearthed and replaced in the shrine.

Within the precinct then dwelt, by leave of the abbot, a boy named Folcwin, whose legs had been, from birth, terribly deformed. On the second anniversary of that elevation, when his age was fifteen, the brethren sang, in the course of mattin lauds, this third verse of the hymn *De Confessoribus*:

Ad sacrum cuius tumulum frequenter  
Membra languentium modo sanitati  
Quolibet morbo fuerint gravata  
Restituuntur.

As they chanted they beheld the shanks of the lad slowly straighten from the knee, and heard the joints crack, while he lay asleep behind the choir. On awaking he stood for the first time erect and described his dream-vision of Aldhelm gently stroking his ugly limbs. News of the event soon reached abbot Warin, who was then at court, and through him Lanfranc, who forthwith decreed that Aldhelm was to be venerated as a saint.

CHAPTER XXXVII  
 ABBOTS OF WEARMOUTH AND JARROW  
 (CEOLFRITH AND HWATBERHT)

These Monks of the Valley will be discerned by the final justice of history to have been absolutely the purest, and probably the most vital, element of Christianity during their period.

Ruskin, *Mending the Sieve*.

**R**IGHT manfully, for twenty-seven years, did Ceolfrith, grown ripe in the wisdom that springs from experience, bear the double burden of administration that had thus fallen to his lot. Keenwitted was he, strenuous in action, ablaze both with love and fear of God, full of glowing zeal for righteousness and the rules of his order. His reproofs were stormy, but his gentle sympathy with penitents was no less refreshing than sunshine. He ate and drank more sparingly than most abbots, and dressed more meanly. The poor found in him a true comforter and liberal bestower of alms. Whatever was asked of him he gladly gave; for whatever was given him he rendered, so high was his notion of honour, more than its equivalent. Such was a bargain he made with king Osred which gave the Jarrow community, instead of the eight hides acquired from Aldfrith, twenty hides nearer their home, at a place then called Sambuce.

To the churches he added several chapels; the store of altar plate and vestments he largely increased; and he set many of his monks to work making beautiful copies of the valuable manuscripts he and Biscop had brought from Italy. From the most valuable, the Codex grandior of Cassiodorus, which they had found in the library of his monastery at Squillace, was copied the famous Codex Amiatinus, the purest text of the Vulgate now extant. In the year 716



pope Gregory II received it as a present from Ceolfrith; Peter of Lombardy afterwards gave it to the abbey of Monte Amiata; and it now lies in the Laurentian Library at Florence. This great pandect of the whole Bible contains 1,029 sheets of beautiful vellum, and is a heavy load for two men. Two other copies were made for home use and placed, one in St Peter's Church, the other in St Paul's, so that every student might quickly find any passage he wanted to read of the Old Testament or the New.

The scribes were probably Italians, whose patience must have been severely tried by the change of climate. The handwriting which prevailed in English monasteries till the close of the tenth century was derived not from the Roman uncials of the Canterbury Psalter but from the Scotie semiuncials of the Lindisfarne Gospels. The former book is, like the latter, among the treasures of the British Museum. Similarly, even at Wearmouth and Jarrow, the Roman apse was rejected in favour of the Scotie square presbytery, the origin of which has been traced to very primitive timber huts.

In order the better to secure against violent and lawless neighbours the worldly goods entrusted to him, Ceolfrith sent, in the year 701, a party of monks, one of whom was named Hwatberht, to obtain from pope Sergius a renewal of the privilege granted by Agatho. When he presented the document at a witenagemot it was willingly subscribed by king Aldfrith and the bishops who were present. Among the novices admitted by Ceolfrith to St Peter's was a learned man named Witmar, who bestowed on that monastery ten hides of land he had received from the same king, at a place called by Beda Daltun.

In or about the year 710 the catholic reckoning of Easter was adopted by Nechtan, who had, four years earlier, succeeded Bruide as king of the Picts. As many of his folk were still unconvinced of their error, he wanted to enlist on his side the highest available authority

and therefore sent envoys to Ceolfrith asking for an explanatory letter, about the tonsure as well as the paschal question, which would enable him to confute obstinate opponents. He also asked for master stonemasons to help him build, in honour of St Peter, a church of the Roman type. Finally he expressed the eagerness of himself and his folk to follow in everything the lead of Rome, unless hindered by remoteness of situation or diversity of language. The masons were promptly sent, and built a stone church, probably at Restennet near Dunnichen, where Ecgfrith had been defeated and slain. The substance of the letter which was also sent Beda has given us in words which are probably his own. The writer argues that the paschal week of Exodus, the third week in the first month of the solar year, begins at xv moonrise, and infers that the Sunday of that week is the proper festival of the Resurrection. To put the beginning a day earlier or later is to fall foul, as it were, of Scylla or Charybdis. To the Egyptians of Alexandria, who 'hold the palm' among professors of astronomy, he rightly ascribes the determination of March 21 as the usual date of the equinox and therefore the usual earliest date of the paschal full moon. Proceeding to the mystical interpretation of this persistent survival of sun-worship and moonworship, he claims that, while the first month of spring is renewing the earth, we ought to renew our love of heavenly things by duly celebrating the event which has snatched us from the jaws of Death. To the third week correspond the third day on which Christ rose, and the three theological virtues—Faith, Hope and Love—which are essential elements in every true commemoration of His passing away from the world to the Father. The paschal full moon must not precede the equinox, because to the action of the sun after the equinox in making day longer than night corresponds the triumph over the darkness of Death which was won by the Sun of Righteousness, when He arose with healing in His wings. To the moon,

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moreover, corresponds His Church, and to the brightness of her full orb the light of inward grace shed after His ascension by the mission of the Holy Ghost. Keble has enshrined the same thought in these familiar words:

The Moon above, the Church below,  
A wondrous race they run;  
Yet all their radiance, all their glow,  
Each borrows of its Sun.

When he found himself, at the age of seventy-four, becoming unable, through senile infirmity, to take an active lead in school and church, Ceolfrith determined after long deliberation to retire to Rome and let the brethren themselves choose a fit successor. He therefore chartered a ship, made a list of companions, prepared gifts for 'blessed Peter' and provided for all the needs of so toilsome a journey; but secretly, lest friends might hinder him or lavish on him gifts of money which he could never repay. On June 2, 716, the Tuesday before Whitsunday, he disclosed his intention to the assembled Petrine brethren. One after another, all fell weeping on their faces before him, grasped his feet and begged him to spare them just one more day. He of course consented, and on Wednesday morning, followed by most of them, went to Jarrow and broke the sad news to the Paulines. The consternation caused there by the announcement is recorded by Bede, who was of course present, in the preface to the fourth book of his commentary on Samuel. The departing abbot besought them, in a touching farewell address, to keep the rule they had learnt, to abide in the fear of God, and to forgive him all undue severity of which he might have been guilty, even as he had himself forgiven all their faults. Weeping in his turn, he at last wrung from them a reluctant consent to his departure; but they earnestly besought his frequent prayers for them while he had breath to pray and his continual intercession afterwards in the realms above.

On Thursday morning mass was chanted in the churches of St Peter and St Mary. Those who were present communicated. Then, having assembled them all in the former church, Ceolfrith kindled incense, prayed before the altar, mounted the steps of his lectern, holding the censer, and there pronounced the peace. Most of them received from him a parting kiss, but some were too broken-hearted to approach their beloved father. As he marched forth, censer in hand, to the chapel of St Lawrence the Martyr in the dormitory, they followed, singing first the antiphon,

The way of the just is a right way,  
And the path of the just Thou directest aright  
(Isaiah xxvi, 7)

They go from strength to strength (Psalm lxxxiv, 7)  
and then Psalm lxvii.

Passing out thence, Ceolfrith delivered his final admonition, bidding them all continue in brotherly love, under the rule of one abbot. The same antiphon and psalm were again sung, with voices broken by sobs, on their way down to the shore; the kiss of peace was again given, a last prayer was recited; he embarked and sat in the prow between two deacons, one of whom held a golden cross, the other a pair of lighted tapers. As the ferry boat was making for the southern shore of the wide estuary, he gazed on the 600 mournful watchers, listened to their voices uplifting a woful dirge and could no longer restrain his own tears. 'Christ have mercy on yonder company!' he exclaimed. 'Lord Almighty protect yon band of men! Well wot I that there are none better or readier to obey. O Christ, who art God, guard them!'

Having disembarked, he knelt before the cross, mounted a horse and rode away, leaving behind all worldly cares and hoping to win, amid the holy places of the Eternal City, such freedom and purity of soul as would fit him for the company of angels.

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Returning to St Peter's church, the brethren first prayed, then conferred about the election and agreed to ask the Lord, amid prayers and fasting, whom they were to choose as their abbot. In obedience to Ceolfrith's order they had arranged to feast and entertain guests on that day, thus turning, as well as they could, their sadness into joy; but afterwards they fasted till three o'clock on Saturday afternoon, praying earnestly, at all the canonical hours, that on the morrow, the festival of the first descent of the Holy Ghost on the Church, they, as a fragment thereof, might by Him be guided in their choice of a ruler. On Whitsunday, after the arrival of very many Pauline brethren, Hwatberht was unanimously chosen. They had long been wont to call him Eusebius, on account of his ardent piety. He had been trained from boyhood at Wearmouth and, in the year 704, been ordained priest. Soon after his election he addressed to Gregory II a letter commending as follows the 'venerable grey hairs' of his predecessor to that pope's 'holy kindness':

'We thank the holy and undivided Trinity that, although not without causing us much grief, he has arrived at the holy joys of the rest he had so long desired, and has become, though weary with age, a devout pilgrim to those thresholds of the blessed apostles which, as he always used to remember with delight, he visited, saw and worshipped in his youth.'

Bearing this letter and gifts for Gregory, Hwatberht and a few brethren tracked Ceolfrith and found him tarrying in a monastery, probably Gilling, the scene of his novitiate. After confirming the election with his blessing and giving much counsel to the new abbot he continued his journey, doubtless visiting other monasteries; Ripon, for instance, Whitby and Beverley. On Saturday, July 4, Ceolfrith and his party embarked in the Humber on a seagoing ship, which landed them in East Anglia, Kent and Wessex before it crossed to Gaul. On Wednesday, August 12, he

set foot on the soil of Neustria and was honourably welcomed by king Chilperic II, who, in return for his gifts, gave written instructions for his free entertainment everywhere in that province. He soon became unable to ride and was carried on a horse litter. At Langres, on September 25, 716, he fell ill and passed peacefully away, at four o'clock in the afternoon. Since the beginning of the journey, which had lasted 114 days, not only had the canonical hours been regularly kept, but the whole psalter had been chanted to him twice every day. Except on the day of his crossing and the last three days of his life he was himself the celebrant at mass. His body was buried about three miles south of the city, in a church dedicated to the martyrs Speusippus, Eleosippus and Meliosippus, three brothers born at one birth, who lay entombed there beside their grandmother Leonella, also a martyr.

Of the eighty companions who had either started with him or been picked up at the various stages of his journey, some bore the news to their fellows at Wearmouth and Jarrow; others continued their journey to Rome, taking to Gregory that letter, the Codex Amiatinus and the other gifts; the remainder, desiring to be near the father they had lost, tarried for awhile at Langres, in the monastery to which that church was attached. Gangulf, the abbot, entertained them generously and furnished them with guides and provisions when they dispersed to their several homes.

Meanwhile bishop Acca had been summoned from Hexham to consecrate Hwatberht. On August 22, 716, the anniversary of Sigefrith's death, the new abbot placed in one chest, with a partition between, his bones and Eosterwini's, and buried them beside Biscop's. On the same day, strangely enough, Witmar died and was buried beneath the porch of St Peter's church, in the former grave of that pair of abbots. To Hwatberht are dedicated two of Beda's works, the allegorical explanation of the Apocalypse, written while they were brother monks, and

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the *De Temporum Ratione*, written in 725. A letter of Winfrith Boniface, written between the years 744 and 747, asked him for some of Beda's commentaries, the writer having heard that 'he lately shone among you like an altar candle through his knowledge of the Scriptures.' The death of Hwætberht is nowhere recorded.

From the presence of Capuan saints in ancient English martyrologies it has lately been inferred that the archetype of Northumbrian mass-books was bought in Italy by Benet Biscop, namely a mass-book that had formerly belonged to the church of San Prisco, in the village S. Maria di Capua, which is all that remains of the ancient city.

The ancestry moreover both of the *Codex Amiatinus* and of the *Lindisfarne Gospels* has been very plausibly traced to a copy of the *Vulgate*, probably written by Jerome himself, which belonged, early in the sixth century, to the library of a monastery on the islet in the Bay of Naples known as *Castel dell' Uovo* (Castle of the Egg). Thence therefore may well have come into Northumbria the Neapolitan lectionary which has hitherto (see pages 193, 313, *supra*) been attributed to abbot Hadrian, whose monastery was probably on the neighbouring islet *Nisita*. The arrangement of Beda's homilies seems to be based on the use of that lectionary at Jarrow.

CHAPTER XXXVIII  
THE FATHER OF ENGLISH LEARNING,  
BEDA THE VENERABLE

Pendant de longs siècles après sa mort ce n'était pas seulement le grand historien qu'on admirait, comme nous l'admirons nous-même; c'était encore et surtout le maître qui embrasse dans sa vaste érudition tout ce qu'on étudiait et tout ce qu'on savait alors dans le monde. . . . Son influence sur toute la chrétienté fut aussi prompte qu'étendue, et ses ouvrages qui remplirent bientôt toutes les bibliothèques monastiques de l'Occident, la firent durer jusqu'à la Renaissance.

Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident*, v, pp. 60, 61.

**A**T Monkton, about a mile westward of Jarrow, is a well named after him, into which, as lately as the year 1740, sick children were dipped, sometimes as many as twenty at a time, in the hope of healing them. On midsummer eve it was duly exorcized by means of a bone fire and loud music. In that village, if tradition may be trusted, the purest pearl of English monachism was born. The year of his birth was probably 673. Of his nobly joyous and strenuous course he gives the following pithy account:

‘At the age of seven my careful kinsfolk put me to school under the very reverend abbot Benedict and afterwards under Ceolfrith. From that time all my life has been devoted to study of the Scriptures. Amid the tasks imposed by rule and the daily round of chanting in church it has been my constant delight to be either learning or teaching or writing.’

It may fairly be inferred that before he was seven years old he had lost both parents, and that, instead of selling him into slavery, his kinsfolk bound him irrevocably to the



monastic life, by leading him up to the altar, disclaiming on his behalf whatever worldly goods might have become his and folding in the altar cloth his tiny hands.

Like the word *bedesman* the name *Beda* means a man who prays and well fitted its bearer. His cheerful regularity in contributing his share to the sevenfold daily round is thus recorded by Alcuin, writing late in the eighth century to warn the monks of Wearmouth against laxity and lukewarmness:

‘Your departed fathers and founders surely pay frequent visits to your dwelling-place, and rejoice with whomsoever they find leading an honourable life and keeping their decrees; for such men they also make unceasing intercession to our brotherly Judge. Nor can it be doubted that churches are a favourite haunt of angels. The story goes that my master and your patron the blessed *Beda* used to say, “I know that angels attend our assembly at canonical hours. What if they do not find me there in my place? Will they not feel bound to ask, Where is *Beda*? Why cometh he not with the brethren to the prescribed meetings for worship?”’

This was doubtless his answer to some well-meant hint that his toilsome studies were too important to be so often interrupted. The unswerving truthfulness and transparent sincerity of all his historical work are the natural fruit of strict regularity in presenting, daily and hourly, to God the living sacrifice of soul and body.

Among his other teachers were *Chad*’s disciple *Tunberht*, the abbot of *Gilling* and bishop of *Hexham*; *Sigefrith*, the fellow pupil of *Cuthbert* at *Melrose*; *Wilfrith*’s pupil and successor *Acca*; *John* the Precentor and *John* of *Beverley*, by whom *Beda* was ordained deacon in 692 and priest in 703. He had free access to the abundant stores of important books collected abroad by *Biscop* and *Acca*. How fully he used his manifold opportunities may be gathered from the fact that he lacked six years of the

canonical age, twenty-five, when deacon's orders were conferred on him. Both ordinations were sought, not of his own accord, but at the bidding of abbot Ceolfrith.

The statement that the whole of his life was spent within the precinct of Jarrow does not of course exclude visits to other monasteries, nor imply that Beda had no intercourse with men of the world. Among the regular and passing guests whose talk enlivened the refectory on festival days were warriors and statesmen, whether ealdormen, reeves or thanes; wayfaring gleemen also and craftsmen; sometimes the king and queen. But most of the guests were of course monks or clergy, some of whom are named by Beda as his authorities. The affairs of Kent and Essex, for instance, he learnt from Albin, the Englishman who succeeded abbot Hadrian in 708, and from Nothelm, a learned and accomplished London priest who became archbishop of Canterbury in 735, the year of Beda's death. For the little he knew about the course of events in Wessex and Sussex he was indebted to bishop Daniel of Winchester. His information about the conversion of Mercia and the re-conversion of Essex came chiefly from the monks of Lastingham, partly also from a priest who had helped Jaruman. As one of his authorities for East Anglian affairs he names abbot Esi, of whom nothing else is known. An elder brother of Jarrow brought him tidings of Fursey from a man who had conversed with that saint. Countless credible witnesses filled the gaps in his own direct knowledge of Northumbrian affairs.

Among Beda's other friends were probably Athelwald, the abbot of Melrose who, in the year 721, succeeded Eadfrith as bishop of Lindisfarne; and Forthere, the second bishop of Sherborne, a very learned man who, two years after Beda's death, escorted to Rome Frithigyth queen of Wessex.

During his diaconate Beda wrote three elementary textbooks of grammar and rhetoric which prove that he had

already become a teacher. The first, *De Arte Metrica*, is mostly copied from other writers on the subject and owes its independent value to illustrative quotations from Christian writers of Latin verse. In the second, *De Schematibus*, definitions of rhetorical figures are illustrated by examples from the Bible, the richest storehouse of such modes of expression. The title of the third is *De Ortiographia*.

In 703 he wrote a chronological tract called *De Temporibus*, which was expanded twenty-three years later into his great scientific work *De Temporum Ratione*, a marvel of learning. The former of these deals with the Ages of the World, following Augustine rather than Isidore and preferring the Hebrew to the Septuagint reckoning. In 708 appeared a supplement, the *Epistola ad Plegwinum Apologetica*. Plegwin was a monk of Hexham in whose presence and Wilfrith's, while they were drinking wine, Beda had been by other 'boorish' monks rashly and wantonly charged with heresy. A brief cosmographical tract, *De Natura Rerum*, is based on ancient authorities but scouts astrology as heathenish.

The *De Temporum Ratione* includes a thorough exposition of divisions of time, astronomical as well as conventional, and a full chronicle of the world's history, as then conceived, including the division into six ages. The Flood divides the first from the second; Abraham the second from the third; David the third from the fourth, which ends with the Captivity of Judah in Babylon. The Birth of Jesus ends the fifth age and begins the sixth, which will last till the Day of Doom. The four closing chapters of the book briefly discuss the remainder of the sixth age, the times of the Second Advent and of Antichrist, the final Day of Doom, the seventh and eighth ages. The seventh, contemporary with the former six, is the Eternal Sabbath of the unseen world, in which the disembodied souls of the faithful rest from their labours

and await the eighth everlasting age of the Blessed Resurrection. Beda dissents from those who assign an exact thousand years to each age and who try to break the seal of secrecy which baffles all human calculation of the Last Day. In his view the two surest tokens of its nearness will be the conversion of the Jews and the reign of Antichrist.

In the earliest of his metrical works, *De Miraculis Sancti Cuthberti*, written not later than 704, the diction is graceful and the hexameters harmonious. His prose work, *De Vita et Miraculis*, based on an earlier, and in some respects better, anonymous life of Cuthbert, is dedicated to bishop Eadfrith, who died in 721, and was probably written not long before his death. Beda's other piece of biography, less romantic but more historical, the charming *Vita Beatorum Abbatum Wiremuthensium et Girvensium*, cannot have been written before 716, the year of Ceolfrith's death, and may well be much later.

Foremost in importance among his works Beda placed his comprehensive expositions of the books of the Bible. It was bishop Acca who probably suggested, as he certainly encouraged, this great undertaking, and to whom were dedicated the most important of them. In an extant letter, full of affectionate feeling and graceful wit, he overcame his pupil's reluctance to compile a commentary on St Luke's Gospel, which had been fully and ably expounded by Ambrose. Beda's comments are mostly copied, more or less exactly, from a very wide range of Church Fathers, among whom his favourites were Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose and Gregory the Great. He sought behind the historical meaning of every passage the typical or allegorical, the tropological or moral and the anagogic or spiritual. Dante bears witness to the persistence of this scheme in later medieval theology; and the following couplet draws the distinctions:

Littera gesta refert; quid credas allegoria,  
Moralis quid agas, quid speres anagogia.

The equivalent English might be put thus briefly:

A record of deeds done, the literal scope;  
Thy duty lies behind, creed, act and hope.

Unlike Augustine of Hippo and Gregory the Great, who were constantly attended by shorthand writers, Beda did all his own writing and copying. In winter time his deft fingers must often have been numbed by cold as he sat at his desk in his fireless cell.

The latest of his commentaries, a supplementary treatise called *Retractationes* on the Acts of the Apostles, proves his knowledge of Greek and his ability as a textual critic. The text he used is now in the Bodleian Library and was probably brought into Britain by Hadrian or Biscop.

The conquest of Spain by the Saracens in the years 709 to 713 threatened the whole of Western Europe, including the British Isles, with subjection to Islam and probably drew Winfrith of Crediton, better known as Boniface, from his monastic retirement at Nutsall near Winchester into the perilous missionary warfare which Wilbrord was already waging in the Rhine Valley. In the year, 716, of his landing on the coast of Friesland, his age was about thirty-six. Many passages in Beda's works prove that the alarm had reached Northumbria. The dreaded invaders soon spread beyond the Pyrenees, seized Narbonne and plundered Gascony. In January, 729, appeared two comets, one shining before sunrise, the other after sunset. This portent of coming woe lasted a fortnight. Later in the same year the restoration of the invincible Abderrahman to the government of Spain seemed fulfilment of the omen. In the summer of 732, having completed his thorough preparations for the conquest of Gaul, he led over the Pyrenees a mighty host which, like a desolating hurricane, crossed the fair valley of the Garonne, stormed and sacked the city of Tours, but was then, on October 10, utterly routed by Charles Martel and his Franks. Abderrahman himself was among

the slain. To none so much as to Wilbrord Clement and Winfrith Boniface did the Hammer owe the recent advancement of his northern frontier and its freedom from the harassing raids of turbulent heathens. They, rather than he, were therefore the true saviours of Western Christendom from the peril of Islam.

The ripest and most valuable fruit of Beda's unremitting toil, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, is not so much a comprehensive history as a chronicle of events, illustrated by charming stories and biographical sketches. A man of his lovable character could not help writing fully and enthusiastically about good men and their deeds, nor bestowing the fewest possible words on the misdeeds of bad men; but the consequence is a somewhat rosier picture than it probably deserves of the heroic period with which he deals. Though his main theme begins with the mission of Austin, the work opens with a summary, in twenty-two chapters, of the history of Britain from the landing of Julius Cæsar as related by Gildas and Orosius. The first book ends with the defeat at Degsastan, in the year 603, of Aedan the Scot by Athelfrith; the second with the defeat and death of Edwin at Hatfield, a generation later. The third book includes the stirring events of the next generation, from the 'loathsome' year 634 to the critical plague year 664; the fourth ends with the death of Cuthbert. In the fifth and last book, which covers twice as long a period as the fourth, the story is brought down to the year 731, in which the work was finished and Brihtwald vacated by his death the archbishopric of Canterbury. The concluding summary of the state of affairs at that time ends as follows:

'While the political atmosphere is smilingly peaceful and calm, quite a crowd of Northumbrians, in public as well as private stations of life, are laying aside their weapons and showing more eagerness to enroll themselves and their children in tonsured regiments than to practise the art of

warfare. How this movement will end is reserved for a later age to see.'

The words thus translated are so carefully chosen that the historian's own attitude towards the movement can hardly be discerned and might even be deemed approval if we had not evidence to the contrary in a letter which was written on November 5, 734, just a century after the 'loathsome' year, to his pupil Ecgberht, the new bishop of York. The aged writer was no longer well enough to travel thither, as he had done a year earlier for the sake of consulting books in the monastic library. Otherwise the letter would not have been written; the swan song of Beda, as it has been aptly called, would have been moaned into Ecgberht's ear; and we should lack a document of surpassing importance.

The letter begins with such fatherly exhortation as the writer's pupils must often have heard. Neither example or precept produces its due effect unless each is enforced by the other. Careful study, in the first place of Holy Scripture, and in the next of Gregory's *Homilies* and *Regula Pastoralis*, will provide the saline seasoning which is essential to Christian talk. No less than paten and chalice the hands and tongue of a celebrant ought to be kept free from profanation. After reminding the bishop how helpful in that way is the companionship of genuine followers of Christ, he deplores the notorious fact that some English bishops then had for their associates no devout and sober men, but instead laughing, jesting, story-telling, gluttonous and winebibbing victims of lawless lust.

Beda proceeds to dwell on the need of parochial organization, since the bishop's utmost activity would not enable him to visit, even once a year, every hamlet or homestead in his diocese. The ordination of priests and training of teachers is therefore urgent. Every Christian ought to know by heart and frequently repeat, if not in Latin at least in English, as a protection against unclean spirits,

the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. He mentions that many monks and clergy were ignorant of Latin; but probably means only the craftsmen and fieldworkers who were so numerous in every monastic brotherhood, and the lower orders of clergy, namely, the doorkeeper who rang the church bell and refused admittance to unbelievers; the acolyte who held the candle, typifying Christ our Light, at the reading of the Gospel and consecration of the house; the subdeacon who carried the altar vessels to and fro; possibly also the exorcist, who might learn and use, without understanding them, the formulae which terrified the imps of Satan. Beda also mentions his own translations of that creed and prayer into English; but they have perished.

He next deplores the unscrupulous conduct of bishops who exact payment of tribute from such inaccessible abodes as Cuthbert loved to visit, but leave them for many years untended, not only neglecting to confirm the baptized but omitting to send any teacher. No disciple of Aidan, we may feel sure, ever demanded money for preaching or confirming; if such fees were first imposed by Wilfrith, both his wealth and his unpopularity are easier to understand. When Beda proceeds to reproach the covetousness of bishops who claim a larger diocese than they can possibly administer, that name stands out hardly less clear than if it had been written. As a first step in the direction of reform he urges Ecgberht to obtain from pope Gregory III, with the aid of Ceolwulf, the pallium which would give him archiepiscopal authority, and then, in accordance with pope Gregory's original scheme, to raise to twelve the number of suffragan bishops in the northern province.

That king, a lineal but illegitimate descendant of Ida, was a brother of the Coenred who succeeded the murdered boy Osred in 716. Two years later, on the death of Coenred, he had been set aside in favour of Osred's brother Osric, but was nominated by the latter on his deathbed as the rightful successor, and accordingly crowned on April 25,



729. The eleven years of Osric's reign he had probably spent in monastic retirement, but without taking vows. In those days monasteries were the only homes of learning and corresponded to the colleges of modern universities. To Ceolwulf Beda thus dedicated the *Historia Ecclesiastica*:

'At thy desire I most gladly send this lately published Church History of the English Nation, as formerly to be read and approved, so now to be copied by thee, and more fully studied at thy leisure.'

He was probably not the only admirer of that work who took the trouble to write his own copy, and he doubtless deserved Beda's praise, not only of his earnestness in studying Holy Scripture but also of his interest in the deeds and words of ancient heroes, especially English. The dedication closes with a statement of the historian's moral aim: to rekindle in the hearts of his readers a burning desire to imitate the achievements of good men and avoid the misdeeds of sinners.

Hardly had the dedication been written when Ceolwulf was captured by insurgents and forcibly tonsured, perhaps in mockery of his literary tastes, perhaps to disqualify him from resuming the kingship; but in the same year, 731, his adherents restored him. To his influence his cousin Ecgberht owed the bishopric of York and the pallium which, in 735, conferred on the see the metropolitan dignity desired by Beda. Two years later he abdicated and retired to Lindisfarne, bestowing on the monastery so much of his own land and treasure that wine was, with his approval, added to the ordinary fare. He lived on till 764, long enough to be saddened by the hopeless disorder of the realm he had forsaken.

For the see of each new bishopric Beda suggested to Ecgberht that a monastery be jointly chosen by king and archbishop; also that the abbot and brethren be conciliated by allowing them to elect one of themselves, if any were fit, and by letting the abbot share with the bishop so elected

jurisdiction over the surrounding diocese. In reference to the possible need of increasing the endowment of such a monastery, he remarks:

‘Countless estates have, as we all know, been most foolishly allotted to monasteries which are utterly undeserving of the name. Would that some of them could be, by the authority of a witenagemot, turned from ugly dens of licentious luxury and gluttony into beautiful homes of purity and godliness!’

He proceeds to deplore the fact that, ever since the strong hand of Aldfrith had been removed by death, that is for a whole generation, hardly any reeve or thane of the king had been guiltless of procuring his own election or his wife’s to an abbacy; and that the conduct of such untrained intruders had brought disgrace on the tonsure. Other laymen moreover had, by bribing kings, obtained grants of folk land from the witenagemot, which included bishops and abbots. Their pretext of building monasteries was merely a cloak for more unbridled self-indulgence, under cover of the usual exemptions from public burdens. Their so-called monks had either been expelled from monasteries for disobedience, or enticed thence by themselves, or else were such servants of their own as would readily follow a bad example. In consequence of this reckless misappropriation of landed property there was so little left to reward military service of loyal thanes that, when they had served their time, they either went abroad or abandoned themselves to debauchery. By such fraudulent grants, therefore, not only was God being cheated of due service but the realm had been stripped of defenders against invasion.

After earnestly beseeching Ecgberht to reform these abuses by diligent visitation of monasteries, Beda recurs to the importance of instructing the laity:

‘Have them taught by what kind of deeds they please God, and what sins of theirs displease Him; with what

'purity of heart they ought to believe in Him, how earnestly to implore His mercy, how frequently with the sign of the cross to fortify themselves and all that is theirs against continual snares of unclean spirits; also how healthful to the whole family of Christians is the daily partaking of the Lord's Body and Blood, according to the custom of the church in Italy, Gaul, Africa, Greece and throughout the East.'

He proceeds to complain that, through the carelessness of teachers, nearly all the Christians of Northumbria had become so estranged from that sacrament as to communicate only at Christmas, Epiphany and Easter; though there were countless young men and maidens, old men and matrons, leading such clean and blameless lives that they might well communicate every Sunday and saint's day.

This memorable document concludes with an impassioned denunciation of avarice, supported by many biblical examples. Only the fear of making the letter inordinately long restrained the writer, so he says, from inveighing likewise against drunkenness, gluttony and other forms of sensuality.

Beda's Latin prose is clear, vigorous, idiomatic and quite free from Aldhelmic bombast. His quotations prove that among classical authors Vergil was his favourite; but his own metrical works fall far short of that model. From a few hints let fall here and there in his works it appears that he had misgivings about the usefulness to Christian students of pagan literature.

Beda's closing years were also clouded by the misfortune of his dearest friend Acca, who was driven from Hexham in 731, probably by the foes of Ceolwulf, and retired to Whithorn. To his tactful work there, may perhaps be attributed the fact that Pehthelm, a monk of Malmesbury, soon became the first English bishop of that see. That was merely his episcopal surname and means Guide of the

Picts. His own name is not recorded. Just so his successor was called Pehtwine, friend of the Picts.

The following beautiful description of Beda's last illness, in the spring of 735, was written by a witness named Cuthbert to his friend Cuthwine. Both held the minor offices of reader. Cuthbert afterwards succeeded Hwaetberht as abbot.

About a fortnight before Easter he was troubled by a weakness which caused him to gasp for breath, but was nevertheless almost free from pain. Thus he continued till Wednesday, May 25, the eve of the Ascension, glad, joyous and thankful to Almighty God at every hour both of day and night. Every day he gave lessons to us his pupils and spent the remainder in chanting psalms as well as he could. By night his prayers and praises were broken only by fitful slumber. As soon as he awoke he began to hum the familiar Scriptural refrains, stretching out his hands in token of thankfulness to God. Truly may I testify that never saw I with my eyes nor heard with my ears anyone so scrupulous as that blessed man in returning thanks to the Giver of all good. He used moreover to repeat the saying of the apostle, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and many other passages of Holy Scripture which warn us to awake from the sleep of the soul by thinking beforehand of our last hour. In our own language also, such was his metrical skill, he spoke of the dreadful parting of soul from body:

Ere the need-fare none may be  
 Wiser than him well behoveth  
 If he but bethink him, before passing hence,  
 What of good or ill after his deathday  
 . May be the doom of his ghost.

He chanted also familiar refrains for our comfort and his own:

King of Glory, Lord of Might,  
 Who to-day didst climb in triumph above all heavens,  
 Leave us not bereft,

But send to us the Father's promised boon,  
Even the Spirit of Truth.

Hallelujah.

At the word 'bereft' he burst into tears and wept much. After a while he again repeated it from the beginning; we mourning, listeners wept with him, now reading, now punctuating the sentences with sobs. So gaily passed those fifty days. Joyously thankful that he had been found worthy thus to suffer, he often said:

'God scourgeth every son whom He receiveth,'  
and quoted Ambrose:

'I have not so lived as to be ashamed to go on living among you; yet am I not afraid to die, for good is our Lord.'

In those days moreover, besides our daily lessons and the chanting of psalms, he was busy with two notable works. For the benefit of God's Church he translated St John's Gospel into English, as far as the passage, 'But what are they among so many?' and also a collection of extracts from the books of bishop Isidore, saying,

'I will not let my sons read a false version, and thereby toil in vain after I am gone.'

On the Tuesday before Ascension Day, he began to struggle for breath and a slight swelling appeared on his feet. All day, nevertheless, he taught and cheerfully dictated, saying now and then:

'Learn hastily, for I know not how long I can hold out, nor how soon my Maker will take me.'

We thought he was perhaps well aware that his end drew nigh. Then, with words of thanksgiving, he passed a sleepless night. At streak of dawn on Wednesday he bade us carefully continue the writing we had begun; we did so till the third hour. Then, as the custom of the day required, we marched in procession with relics of saints. One of us remained with him and said:

'The book thou hast been dictating lacketh yet one chapter, but methinks it is hard for thee to answer questions.'

'Nay, quite easy,' quoth he; 'take thy quill, mend it and write in haste.'

At the ninth hour he said to me:

‘I have in my little box a few treasures, pepper, napkins and incense. Run quickly, bring me the priests of our monastery, that they may share God’s gifts to me.’

Trembling I obeyed. In their presence he spoke to each and all, bidding and beseeching them to be heedful in saying masses and prayers for him. They gladly promised, but mournfully, weeping to hear words which meant that they could not much longer see his face in this world, rejoicing however when he said:

‘It is time for me, if such be the will of my Maker, to escape from my flesh into His presence, who, when I was not, formed me out of nothing. Long have I lived and well hath my merciful Judge ordered my life. The time of my release is at hand, for indeed my soul yearneth to behold Christ my King in His beauty.’

Talking thus for our profit, he joyfully spent his last day till eventide. And the aforesaid lad, named Wilbert, again spoke:

‘Yet one sentence, dear master, remaineth to be written.’

‘Well, then,’ quoth he, ‘write it.’

Presently quoth Wilbert: ‘Now it is written.’

‘True is thy word: well is it finished. Take my hand in thy hands, for it giveth me much pleasure to sit opposite my sanctuary, my usual place of prayer, that so sitting I may call upon my Father.’

Thus, on the floor of his cell, singing the Gloria, he breathed his last on Wednesday evening, May 25, 735.

The bones of Beda lay at Jarrow till the middle of the eleventh century, when Alfred, son of Weston, a priest of Durham, desiring to divert to his own church the lucrative stream of devotees, stole those precious relics and removed them thither. At the translation of Cuthbert’s relics in the year 1104, Beda’s were found in the same coffin, beneath a false bottom. Thence they were removed by bishop Hugh Pudsey to the Galilee of the Cathedral, in a shrine of gold and silver, which held them till the desecration of 1541. On the casket were inscribed the following lines, which prove that the epithet Venerable had already been appropriated to him:

Continet haec theca Bedae Venerabilis ossa,  
Sensum factori Christus dedit, aesque datori.  
Petrus opus fecit, praesul dedit hoc Hugo donum;  
Sic in utroque suum veneratus utrumque patronum.

If any reader of this book sets before him as his aim in life to give to the world as much as he can and to take in payment as little as he needs, the Father of English Learning will surely stand high among his favourite heroes.

HERE ENDS

‘PIONEERS OF OUR FAITH’

‘Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, . . . run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.’

Heb. xii, 1, 2.

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- XII. (b) life of Fursey by a contemporary monk of Péronne, who writes as though he had himself kept watch all night near the tomb he describes;
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[The fifth and last book tells us nearly all we know of Aldhelm. In describing the posthumous cures wrought at the Shrine in his own lifetime he twice misdates Whitsunday in order to make it coincide with Aldhelm's festival. It may therefore be doubted whether the thought he attributes to Theodore, 'sufficere tantos sumptus tantaeque diocesis circuitum quattuor episcopis,' justifies the inference of W. Bright that, when Wilfrith's unwieldy diocese was first divided, it was proposed to leave him 'in possession of the see of York and the charge of part, probably the larger part, of Deira.' There is no earlier authority for this inference; and William's unsupported authority is, by Professor Oman, in several passages of his above-named book, stigmatized as worthless.]

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 [These are the passages of the *Historia Francorum* which mention her marriage:  
 iv. 26 (a. 562): Porro Charibertus rex Ingobergam accepit uxorem, de qua filiam habuit, quae postea in Ganthia virum accipiens est deducta.  
 ix. 26 (a. 589): Ac post paucis mensis quibitania aergritudine fatigata, migravit a saeculo, multus per chartulas, liberas derelinquens, septuagesimo, ut arbitror, vitae anno, relinquitur filiam unicam, quam in Canthia regis cuiusdam filius copulavit.  
 The gist of the former passage was probably written in 575, but the last clause may have been added after Gregory had stood by Ingoberg's deathbed. He probably neither knew nor cared whether Albert or Eadbald was the bridegroom of the daughter whom he does not name, and whose age cannot be fairly inferred from his rough guess at her mother's. A safer clue to his meaning is the tense *copulavit*; but certainty seems unattainable.]  
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